



✱

89  
50







LOVE AND THE CRESCENT



# LOVE AND THE CRESCENT

*A TALE OF THE NEAR EAST*

BY

A. C. INCHBOLD

*Author of*

*"Under the Syrian Sun," "The Road of No Return,"*

*"Phantasma" "Love in a Thirsty Land," etc.*



NEW YORK  
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS



*Copyright, 1919, 1920, by*  
**FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY**

---

*All rights reserved*

# LOVE AND THE CRESCENT

## CHAPTER I

SOME ONE was uncommonly restless on the terrace of the hotel. He was pacing untiringly to and fro though the night was very warm and very still. His step was light and alert and the supple swing of movement was charged with nervous force. He walked with his head thrust forward meditatively, and he was smoking as if for a wager against time.

Chatter of voices curiously varied in tone, laughter, and the tinkling of glass and coffee cups drifted through the open French windows, sounds that contrasted oddly with the superb calm and crystal atmosphere of the open.

For the locality of this summer hotel was on a highland plateau of Syria, some 3,000 feet above sea and plain. The matchless prospect around was of billows of mountain ridges, while immediately below the eye a pine strewn slope, scattered with huge boulders of rock, slid almost perpendicularly into a deep ravine. Daylight would show in its depths a sturdy stream hurtling its way through thickets of rose-laden oleanders.

A lull in the gayety caught the walker's attention.

He paused opposite one of the glass doors and stared into the lighted interior. He stood in shadow or surely the look in his eyes would have been more guarded.

It was a typical French physiognomy, mobile yet strong, showing a play of expression that revealed more than ordinary interest in the scene contemplated.

A number of lamps shed a mellow glow into every part of the long *salle-à-manger* which did duty as salon to the hotel guests. The red of the Turkish *tarboosh* was conspicuous at one long table where a number of men were playing *loto*.

Near the table a distinguished looking Oriental, in the uniform of a Turkish general, with feet tucked up and shoes on the floor, occupied the center of a spacious *divan*.

He was a strong-limbed, lean man with keen, blue-gray eyes, an aquiline nose, a red-brown mustache, long and drooping, and hair almost black under his *fez*.

A second officer, spectacled, and with iron-gray beard, sat near him with only the elbow rest between. Both men were smoking cigarettes. Intermittently they exchanged remarks in staccato under-tones.

Ahmed Pasha, the younger man, was on his way to inquire into some serious disturbance between Moslems and Christians in an inland Syrian town. With his second in command, Mahmoud Pasha, the elderly Turk by his side, and various officials now seated at the long table with a few local notables, he was making a half way halt on his journey.

Flurry, not to say exaggerated agitation, among the hotel personnel had attended the unannounced arrival. With surprising affability His Excellency had at once given orders that the routine of the day should not be interrupted, and that the same menu in preparation for the other guests would also serve for him and his officers.

Dinner was over but Ahmed Pasha had not retired to



the suite of rooms prepared for his use. He remained cross-legged on the divan like an impassive spectator at a play, ostensibly watching the excited loto players and occasionally tossing a remark to one and the other.

In striking contrast to this desultory interest were the piercing side glances he flashed at intervals towards an alcove big as a room, occupied apparently by Europeans.

Mahmoud Pasha's attention strayed in the same direction, not intermittently, however, but with sustained and open curiosity.

One group in the alcove was particularly animated while watching a man and a girl draw near the end of a keenly contested game of draughts.

"There!" exclaimed the girl, speaking in French as she removed two captured kings from the board. "How is that, mother?" she added, turning to a fragile looking woman with auburn hair, sitting beside her on the high backed sofa.

"Bravo!" approved Madame Anna Severin in a low-toned mellow voice, her wistful lips parting with a smile as she regarded the diminished men of the opponent. "You'll have some pains to redeem that loss, Herr Rosen."

"It is nothing—nothing at all, I assure you, Madame. The game is by no means lost," was the optimistic reply of the second player who sat on the opposite side of a small card table drawn up to the sofa.

Herr Otto Rosen was a German of typical solid build with an obstinate jaw, and close upright hair of a sandy hue without a parting. While staring at the board he twirled swiftly the points of a thick mustache, which of darker shade than his hair, made a gash across his face, standing out aggressively on either cheek.

For an instant Madame Severin's deep-set eyes looked at him, then their veiled but probing gaze traveled round the room before returning to the embroidery in her hands. Her brow was troubled. She stole a glance at Veronica, who appeared totally unconscious of the bold looks of admiring curiosity flung at her from the long table as well as the divan.

Yet in reality Veronica was far from serene. Small signs of mental disturbance were visible to her mother, who pondered over their origin. For the clear pallor of the girl's cheeks was flushed to a rose pink. Her eyes, large and peculiarly blue beneath their fringe of dark lashes were almost black in hue. Their gaze was restless, now intent on the game, now directed suddenly to the door or flung through the open window opposite into the velvety darkness beyond; then back again to study the disposition of the draughts, and later to dart across the table a quizzical yet bewildering glance flickered with gay and saucy triumph.

Once without knowing it she looked direct into the eyes of the watcher on the terrace. He moved a step forward, then with a resolute movement withdrew.

Two questions were driving through Veronica's brain while to all appearance the game engrossed her attention.

Why had Pierre Marson been absent so long? Where was he?

Two hours ago the bells of the mountain mule train ringing the approach of letters and papers had broken up conversation of a very intimate nature between Pierre and herself. Directly the bells became audible the spell had shivered utterly and swiftly as a pricked soap bubble.

She had known he was waiting impatiently for letters,

important ones, but only at the instant of his apology for leaving her abruptly did she realize how slender were the links of intimacy between, and how little each one knew of the other's life. Yet so ready and irresistible had been the sympathy between them even in the first hour of acquaintance—only three days earlier by the way—that neither a longer space of time nor its bosom friend propinquity could have rendered it more complete.

Pierre Marson's seat had been vacant at table-d'hôte. Veronica had reflected that probably correspondence had obliged a meal in his own room. Surely he would come back before the evening was over.

But for this hope Veronica would readily have given way to her mother's suggestion of withdrawing to their rooms at the end of dinner.

Instead she accepted with unusual friendliness Herr Rosen's challenge to a game of draughts. As German consul in the distant town where the Severins had lived for a score of years, he was not only on a familiar footing with the family but had displayed for some time all the stubborn perseverance of his Teuton nature in efforts to win Veronica's affections.

She was certainly desirable to any man's eyes, a striking and charming figure in her white summer frock as she reclined with languorous grace against the yellow silk background of the sofa. Her hair was very black and soft and abundant while her skin had the creamy texture of a magnolia petal. Just above the wavy line where the hair grew thickly about about her low, broad forehead before spreading out to cling with tiny tendrils round her ears, a band of ribbon was slung in color the same blue as her eyes. The calm lines and dignified modeling



of the lower part of her face were of a distinctly Roman type. By birth, however, she was Russian on her mother's side, and her dead father, Doctor Nicholas Severin, who had gained his skill in a Paris hospital, had been of Armenian parentage. Such grafting of race is by no means uncommon in the near East, but not always are the human flowers which spring from it of so rare and sweet a quality as Veronica.

With dismay simmering into hot rage Pierre Marson, still stationary on the terrace, could not fail to notice the magnetism of the girl's beauty for the Oriental guests. Like all men who know their East he could appraise the exact value of their admiration.

Incensed he regarded Madame Severin. What did she mean by submitting her daughter to such an ordeal? And pray, where was Veronica's brother, the sober-faced, reticent doctor? Why could not that blind ass of a Rosen have so arranged his chair at the table as to screen his partner from the insult of such glances?

For an instant Marson meditated a dash of rescue into the room to carry her off. Where? Anywhere as long as it was out of the radius of that Turkish circle. Then his excitable Gallic blood was suddenly cooled by the mental reminder that, all too soon, he must be bidding her good-by with small prospect, as far as the present house could foretell, of ever seeing her again.

What right then had he to interfere at all?

He stood stock still another moment frowning hard to himself. Then he walked quickly to the end of the terrace and entered the vestibule of the hotel. The manager was busy in his office.

"How long are your new visitors staying, Dimitri?" asked Monsieur Marson.

Under the light of the hanging lamp he showed up a distinguished and noticeable figure. He looked very tall and big in his white linen clothes. His eyes were dark and keen, and he had the clear bronzed skin of one living much in the open air.

"To-morrow they go or perhaps after to-morrow, I cannot tell," replied the Greek with a propitiatory gesture. "Monsieur will not be incommoded as he is leaving in the early morning."

"Not at all. I merely asked out of curiosity. Any fresh news through to-night?"

"Unless the Moslems are playing one of their hidden games they are holding their hands for the moment. They expect the Pasha and know that, being a just man, he will protect the innocent and discover the guilty."

"It is all in the Christians' favor then?"

"You have said it, effendi, but"—here Dimitri's face lengthened—"doubtless the worst is yet to come."

"Don't imitate the raven, Dimitri. It is not profitable. Besides peace will last for the present. I am a good prophet."

"Monsieur has perhaps received the latest telegrams," began the man eagerly, but Pierre was already swinging along the corridor as though hastening to an urgent engagement.

Half way along a door opened and the man whose seeming neglect of his womankind Pierre had condemned stepped into the passage.

A little girl with floating fair curls, and a delicate piquant little face with brilliant dark eyes, was clinging to his arm. She was slightly lame, and it flashed upon Pierre Marson, suddenly confronted with the pair, that

solicitude for his motherless girl might easily blind Nicholas Severin to a wider responsibility.

A foregone conclusion not entirely just. For though Zia possessed the most devoted of fathers, Doctor Severin's output of that intuition and sympathy never lacking in the born healer, was instinctive and even prodigal. Pierre ought to have seen him at home in his hospital, or in the midst of daily dispensary work when the ailing of many races—Arabs, Bedouin, Jew, Armenian—all gathered at his gate, or squatted in the dust of the roadside waiting their turn to a hearing and treatment that was never denied.

On the other hand it would never occur to Nicholas Severin when his mother was at hand, to meddle in a matter of propriety touching Veronica. Besides their code of feminine etiquette was entirely European and not Oriental. It was as absolutely correct from his standpoint for his mother and sister to brave the fire of Turkish curiosity as it was for the American missionaries forming another small party in the alcove. His sister's beauty was a factor that a brother would be less likely than another man to take into consideration.

The Armenian strain in the family was more evident in Doctor Severin than in Veronica. His eyes were unmistakably Oriental, full, almond-shaped, and deep, soft and dark as a midnight sky. The nose was straight and well formed with sensitive nostrils. The short trimmed beard and hair were black as jet. His figure of medium height was slim and erect, while his step and carriage had the ease and lightness of the born Oriental.

The slow-gathering smile with which he looked up evoked a curious glow of response from Pierre's eyes. It was so strangely like the smile of Veronica.



"Hullo, so there you are at last, mignonne," Pierre called out gayly. "Where have you and the good papa been hiding?"

"Indeed, we have not been hiding," said Zia earnestly. "Father has been rubbing my leg and stopped the aching."

"That's splendid," said Pierre, caressing her curls, "but do you know Mémé looks as if she missed you. Go and cheer her up while father comes on the terrace for a little air."

"You must not be long, papa," she said, imperatively.

"Aunt Veronica is playing draughts with Herr Rosen," put in Pierre artfully.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, drawing in her breath, then letting it escape slowly in thrilling anticipation. "Then he will have to play with me. Father, you will make him?"

"By holding the medicine bottle in one hand and a lancet in the other," suggested Pierre.

Zia stared at him open-eyed, then with an access of understanding mirth laughed loud and shrilly.

"You funny man!" she cried. "I shall tell him just what you said."

"Come along then," said her father, "quick, quick! I shall join you on the terrace in a few minutes, Monsieur Marson."

"Good luck, Zia!" called Pierre Marson, looking after them.

He went outside again and began to walk to and fro, but leisurely, and in a less preoccupied mood. A glance into the *salle-à-manger* again held him. His look and bearing were those of a man curbing a strong inclination.

"To what good?" he muttered. "The ennui of

regret, undoubtedly. Divided interests are out of the question . . . but who knows . . . later . . .” and he continued to look steadily into the room with an expression in his eyes into which it was just as well those inside could not read their own interpretation.

“I fear you are remaining on the terrace solely on my account,” said a voice at his side.

“Not in the least,” said Marson, turning sharply round. “Thank you,” he added, taking a cigar from the case held out by Dr. Severin. “The Pasha and his following interest me. That is all. Yet as I am leaving to-morrow I wish to spare myself the ennui of a visit of ceremony.”

“You would find it less wearisome than you imagine. He is quite an interesting character and bears an excellent reputation. People have great faith in his opinion.”

“So Dimitri told me. A Turk, I suppose?”

“No, a Kurd, strange to say, and once nothing less than a brigand of might and note like so many of his race.”

“A brigand!” echoed Pierre, turning shortly to scan with kindling gaze the keen-featured man on the divan.

“Yes, and he seems to have been influential in that career as in this his latest, the judicial. He gave so much trouble and had such a big following of rebels that the late Sultan took a bold step.”

“Abdul Hamid certainly had a few original ideas,” interposed Pierre as they began to pace the terrace, Dr. Severin speaking in a subdued voice with an occasional swift glance around as if to see they were still alone.

“Very good in this particular,” he said dryly. “He made overtures of peace to Ahmed Agha, declaring that

if he would renounce the life of brigandage he should be received into the Turkish army with the rank of major. Ahmed Pasha accepted the offer and soon became one of the finest and most valuable officers in the service. He is universally respected and feared to a like degree."

"I suppose he was drafted into the famous Has-madich cavalry?"

"To start with."

"Had you met him before to-day?"

"Once he paid a visit to my hospital when passing through Opella. An ancient member of his band of free-booters lay dying there of an incurable malady, and hearing that his old agha was in the town begged to see him. I made the request personally and privately and Ahmed Pasha yielded to the wish of the dying."

"No false pride then, or shame shall I say, to cause him to wish to hide all evidence of his earlier career of pillage and probably murder?" asked Marson shortly, for some occult reason feeling keen on detecting a flaw in the panache of this regenerated bandit.

"No grounds existed for shame from his standpoint or that of other people. On the contrary, the remembrance has invested him with a halo of amazing wisdom and military skill in the eyes of the people, especially the hill folk."

"I hope the errand on which he is bound relates only to a local disturbance."

"I hardly know. There are so many incentives in Asiatic Turkey to stir up friction. News is disquieting rather than otherwise," said Nicholas Severin uneasily. "Since Abdul Hamid's iron grip has left the helm, certainty in this country is more than ever an unknown quantity. Christians of Syria and Asia Minor generally



are acutely alive to the fact that unrest in Constantinople is usually the prelude to local massacres under the faintest pretext . . . especially since these last cursed wars."

"It seems to me that once the young Turk party is rid of military stress there are signs that they will then set to work on the development of national resources," said Pierre, confidently. "Industry and agriculture once in full swing the antagonistic factions will cease to agitate. There will be no time to invent and circulate those eternal suspicions which create the disasters."

"God knows!" said the doctor with an accent of melancholy fatalism. "I have heard many promises but lived to see precious few fulfillments. What can we do without railroads for instance? Projects for making them are always in the air, but how many are there that come to anything?"

"The Germans seem pretty active over the Bagdad railway scheme anyhow, worse luck," said Pierre, "but one or two others are going straight ahead that have nothing to do with them. I can vouch for that."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nicholas Severin, his eyes turning to Pierre's face with a flash darting from their dark depths. Had he spoken out what was in his mind it would have been of plans of the kind approved by the Turkish government, past and present, constantly coming to naught; of extensive surveys and long reports, and yet nothing accomplished; of schemes marching to apparent execution and then the working of them proving barren through broken or neglected promises. For did not hurry make of man a slave when all the future, free and limitless, lay ahead?

"For that very reason, now this seeming lull has set in, I can delay my journey no longer," continued Marson,

earnestly. "The papers for which I was waiting, my various passports and permits are now all secured. I start early to-morrow."

"You expect to be away a year I think you said."

"Just about! For my mission and its practical development cannot be hurried. There is only one thing that could check me. That is war, which is always more or less in the air these days. Also local difficulties may arise. Arabs in the interior may not all be friendly."

"Backsheesh is the price of their good-will and the ready solvent to obstacles they push in the way."

"Unless others have been first in the field. Those Germans crop up everywhere. But what have we here?" said Pierre, stopping suddenly as they passed one of the open windows.

"Not only a just ex-brigand but a strict devotee to the Moslem faith," and he threw up his head, laughing noiselessly.

## CHAPTER II

ONE minute earlier a Turkish orderly had entered the *salle-à-manger* carrying a small rolled carpet. Near the divan of the pashas he unfolded it on the floor, salaamed, and then stepped noiselessly to one side, where he remained still as a statue.

Ahmed Pasha's impassive face became suddenly disturbed by an uneasy quiver as his neighbor on the divan got up with folded hands.

A few hurried words in an undertone passed between the two, then Ahmed Pasha also rose to his feet with a slow movement of dignity. Towards the alcove he cast a narrow glance sideways, walked a few steps across the room as if considering his mode of action, then turned resolutely to his companion who was standing gravely on the carpet.

Side by side they knelt in evening prayer to Allah. Certain members of the party at the big table regarded one another with subdued faces. A shrug here, a quick gesture there, a vivid flashing of dark eyes right and left, and a few others got up and followed the lead given them by their superior officers.

A strange silence fell upon the rest of the room while the kneelers began to go through the full gamut of Moslem genuflexions, prostrations and muttered formulas. The low monotonous murmur of their voices was curiously impressive.

Pierre Marson looked eagerly towards the alcove where

Zia, seated between her grandmother and aunt, was far too buried in her game to take notice of anything happening outside the limits of the small table in front of her.

Herr Rosen had cast a swift glance around to ascertain the nature of the movements, then his lips had curled superciliously. He made no comment, only worked the ends of his mustache more industriously than before. He was willing enough to be amiable to Zia and even to allow her to carry off the honors of victory after a purposely protracted game, provided that Veronica remained in the corner of the sofa, her eyes fixed with seeming interest on the board. But his air of conscious virtue refused to be hidden.

Veronica had ceased to expect Pierre. Her restlessness had ebbed to a calm, the pink flush had vanished from her cheeks. Her gaze, hidden under lowered eyelids, was miles away. She looked like some beautiful statue, still and meditative, as she leaned slightly forward, her hands clasped upon her knees. She was preoccupied and even sad.

For while she sat quietly there her thoughts dwelt persistently on the morrow. She would be sitting there as now, but Pierre Marson, her new friend, would be far away, passed out of her life. Their short intercourse would have come to an end. Yet what did it matter? And what was it that gave her that mental reluctance to face the plain fact that he was going away?

As this question, often repeated, again thrust its barb into her mind she became acutely conscious in every nerve that light, firm steps were advancing on the tessellated tiles from the direction of the window. The gravity of her lips relaxed into an involuntary smile of



glad surprise. For an instant her eyelids quivered, then lifted slowly as she looked up and beyond the card-table to the spot where the footsteps had come to a standstill behind Herr Rosen.

Pierre Marson was looking straight into her eyes with something dominating in his gaze to which she responded instinctively as to a call. His silence was made intelligible by one gesture indicating the kneelers at prayer, while another directed to the open window behind was plainly significant.

The girl bent sideways behind Zia and whispered to Mme. Severin, who nodded indulgently, and while glancing with a smile at Pierre took up a soft white shawl beside her.

Veronica took the wrap, rose noiselessly and went forward, while still the monotone of voices continued to mutter through the room.

Of a sudden Herr Otto Rosen awoke to a change in the situation. With an abrupt movement he twisted his chair half round just in time to see Pierre and Veronica pass through the window and vanish in the dusk without.

His eyes hardened and narrowed. The chair creaked loudly as he turned back and stared across at Mme. Severin with a certain cynical challenge in his glance. But she appeared to be negotiating a difficult passage in her embroidery and either did not or would not see the unspoken question.

"Go on! I am waiting," said Zia, imperiously, her cheeks ablaze with the fire of her interest in the game.

A deep line suddenly showed between Herr Rosen's brows. His lips tightened. For a moment he looked fixedly into space, then with a quick, almost ferocious,

gesture he put out his hand and swept the whole of the draughts into a huddled heap.

"Enough! It is time for children to be in bed," he said in a harsh voice.

Zia's sharp scream of dismay at the amazing act changed promptly into an outcry of passion and heated retort which Mme. Severin tried in vain to curb.

Veronica stopped short outside the window and then made a vacillating movement towards the room.

"No! It is all right. Your brother is going in. He has already entered," said Pierre, stepping in her way. "He can manage her best. Come this way!"

With the force of the stronger will he led her to the spot where the mule bells had broken into their talk. It was a little bay in the terrace parapet. Hurriedly he dragged forward the same wicker chairs which had been thrust back when he and Veronica had come away.

"Sit down," he said gently, and then when she was in the chair he stood beside her for a moment without speaking.

Before them the jet black silhouettes of tree tops emerged from the shadows. The fragrance of pines and aromatic shrubs rose like the breath of incense from the darkness of the gorge. A rippling light as of the dawn vaguely silvered the furthest ridge of the mountain chain. It spread over the sky above, and then the stars paled on their purple background. The full moon began to climb slowly into view above the hills.

To Veronica the silence felt like a sudden shadow between them. Under pressure of a growing nervousness she began to speak rapidly in a low voice.

"The little Zia is not really naughty. Certainly she is spoiled a little, but then she is very delicate and

suffers cruelly at times. If her mother had lived it would have been different."

Pierre turned at once and sat down on the parapet facing her.

"Yes," he said absently, "yes," his brown eyes fixed upon her with an absorbing look.

"The pasha will understand. No doubt he has children of his own. It would be strange, indeed, if they are not very willful. They always are in this country. Zia is an angel compared with many."

"Who was her mother?" he asked.

"She was the sister of an Englishman who lives outside Opella. He has a silk factory and employs a great number of native work people. He and my brother used to be great friends, but he has become strange and a little eccentric in his way of living, and since Zia's mother died we see less and less of him." She paused, then added hurriedly, "Especially since his marriage to the daughter of Sheikh Mabruk of one of the Weldeh camps."

Pierre Marson's eyes widened. He was amazed and not altogether pleased at this climax, which let loose a whole flock of unwelcome side issues.

"An original, evidently," he said lightly, "but exactly the kind of thing one expects of an expatriated Englishman. One extreme or the other, and preferably the most startling. The whole hog as his countrypeople soulfully put it."

"Zorah is beautiful," said Veronica, refusing to treat the subject humorously, "and sweet-tempered, and very brave."

"A whole rosary of charms," Pierre replied, his eyes

sparkling wickedly, "but why brave? Is the Englishman as difficult as all that?"

"Oh no, she adores her husband. It is because many of her tribe are angry at her marriage with a Roumi. It puts her outside the camp, makes her a kind of out-cast. Her father was willing, so she takes no notice of the others and visits him just the same."

"Do you visit the Englishman and his Arab wife?"

"Not often. They come to us, for you see Mr. Culver is Zia's uncle. He was devoted to his sister, who was a very sweet and clever woman. Next to her father Zia thinks nobody is equal to her Uncle John."

Veronica's spasm of nervousness had vanished. Her absence of pose and self-consciousness had a distinct charm apart from the imaginative glamor shed over her whole fascinating personality by the growing radiance of the moon. His dark eyes dwelt upon her with a look of illumined tenderness. Was it possible he had never even known of her existence three short—no, very long—days ago?

"I am going to-morrow. It is quite settled. My marching orders came with the mail," he said, changing the subject abruptly.

"As soon as that?" she said. "Then you are glad to realize your wishes."

"I ought to be, but I am not quite sure," he said, slowly. "I want to go because it is the highest thing to me in life to be a pioneer for my country. I want to bear the colors of France into the unknown, to be one of those who help to change the surface of the desert into a garden. Yet I want to stay here—" he paused, and turned his hand on the parapet to gaze on the magic



panorama of moon-bathed rocks and hill tops. Reflection was urging him to a prudent reserve in spite of emotion's insistent demand for expression. "I am leaving to-morrow," he repeated, again facing her. "Will you think of me at times?"

Her heart began to beat quickly as she listened. Though she forced a smile the reply, "Why, of course!" falling from her lips was almost a whisper.

"Would you give me a welcome if you saw me again one day, say at your home in Opella?" he said with sudden recklessness.

"A good welcome," she said frankly, meeting his ardent look without wavering. "I should be very happy to see you there, so would Mother and Nicholas."

"Thank you! That is what I wanted to be sure of," he said, speaking with so eager and tender an accent that she became confused and turned her head to look far over the gorge.

A nervous impulse again drove her to words.

"We should miss you enormously if our visit here were only beginning," she said.

"When do you leave then?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"So much the better. I am glad to hear it," he said shortly.

"But why?" she asked, looking round again, her embarrassment conquered by surprise.

"There are too many natives here, impudent beggars!"

She laughed merrily, womanlike catching readily at this chance to postpone a crisis of which a secret trembling of soul warned the approach.

"Do not laugh, I beg of you! I am quite serious," he

said with something of distress and even of mortification within him that gayety could at this moment lie so near the surface of Veronica's mood.

"I am sorry," she said, "but I could not help picturing the faces those distinguished notables of Stamboul and Damascus would draw if they overheard your remark. It was so droll to dump them all into one basket. You will learn to make distinctions in your travels."

"Never! My opinions are quite formed. But why are we wasting our time on these matters? Let us speak of ourselves. I want you to write to me sometimes, Veronica."

He spoke with a throb in his voice. The name had escaped so naturally that save for the splendid sudden glow at her heart she took its utterance as a matter of course.

He had taken her hand and held it in a warm firm clasp. The moon rays lit her face. She was gazing directly at him, with a grave shining of the eyes.

"You would really like it? Then you must write to me first," she said in a low voice, "or I shall not know where you are."

He pressed her hand more closely, then bent his head and kissed it softly.

"Of course I shall write, for you give me permission, and who knows but that next year some time—" he paused, making a final effort to conquer that something irrepressible within. His voice shook as he went on, "I dare not say now what I would wish. I have a duty, a mission—"

"You must come in, Veronica," said Dr. Severin's voice, coming from a little distance away. "Little mother is tired."

In a moment the girl was on her feet. With a slight shiver she drew her mother's big shawl closely round her shoulders. Though a strange tremulous joy had invaded her heart it was shadowed by a vague aching that would later become enlarged to a substantial pain for all that had been left unsaid, and all that might never be said.

Anger crowned Pierre's first rush of feeling at the interruption. This was as quickly followed by a sense of narrow escape from a perilously strong and sweet temptation which had sprung up with speed of magic to bar the road of his pledged word and duty to France.

First in order must come his mission, he told himself doggedly. Later—later—was the word with which he sought to still the hunger at his heart as they walked slowly towards Nicholas Severin.

During those few steps taken side by side under the spell of a pregnant silence Veronica knew that she loved Pierre. And Pierre was going away. How could she bear it? She felt stunned, and yet filled with the burning instinct of concealment. He must not know, not yet! Her face suffused first with the fear and then with the certainty that already she must have betrayed her secret.

She made a brave rally as she stretched out her hand before entering the room.

"Then this must be good-by," she said in her normal voice. "I wish you all success in every way, and bon voyage!"

"No!" returned Pierre emphatically. "Au revoir! At Opella next year."

"Au revoir, then," returned Veronica, gayly, though now she could not raise her eyes.

Then she drew her hand away and went immediately into the hotel.

"Ah!" ejaculated Mme. Severin softly, watching Veronica, as pale and very grave but still with the shining in her eyes she came up to the sofa. The pasha and his party had all gone from the room.

"Where is Zia?" asked the girl, her voice vibrating slightly gave the only sign of emotion.

"In bed asleep. She was worn out. And Monsieur Marson, where is he?"

"Outside with Nicholas. I expect he would like to see you, as he leaves early to-morrow."

"Then, my little one, it is not forbidden for him to enter and make his adieux to me here."

Veronica cast a look of unconscious appeal at her mother as she turned to the window.

"It is not necessary," said Mme. Severin, getting up quickly. "Nicholas will make my excuses. He knows I am tired. Give me your arm, Veronica. It is very late already."



### CHAPTER III

**B**ETWEEN Veronica and her mother existed an absolute confidence, so that when inside their bedroom Mme. Severin drew her by the arm, face to face, and looked into her eyes the girl's still pallor melted under the questioning gaze.

"He loves me," she whispered, radiant and trembling.

"And then?" asked the mother.

"He is coming next year."

"Next year," repeated Mme. Severin, blankly, her forehead contracting. "Where to?"

"To us—at home," and suddenly with the words Veronica felt a sharp presentiment of the pains of uncertainty and of absence. She drew in her lower lip tightly to check its untimely quiver. For though, deep within, her heart already ached, the wonder and joy of the past hour were still uppermost.

Anna Severin folded the girl in her arms and kissed her tenderly. With wise intuition she ceased to press for details. Dilation upon an indefinitely deferred wooing bearing on the surface so vague a prospect of fruition was better suppressed. She was conscious through the night that Veronica was very wakeful.

"My poor little girl," she sighed under her breath, opening her eyes in the early morning to see a slim young figure in white noiselessly unlatch the shutters and then remain upright by the window in a listening attitude.

Close at hand from the court below rose the stir of

horses to the accompaniment of Arabic exclamations and shrill chatter. Then a tempered pause as a clear but subdued voice gave a sudden order which was followed by a noise of cantering.

Pierre Marson had passed an agitated night broken by dreams in which he had lost Veronica, and in the urgent drive of seeking her had faced perils of a remarkable and terrible nature. Was it premonition or over-anxiety, he questioned, as he opened his eyes. Sunlight restored a normal outlook, and in the bustle and concentrated purpose of departure he forgot the perturbed travail of his sleep.

A spasm of emotion that memory was to bring back at intervals during the day, and in days still to come, caught his breath, as turning in the gateway for a last look at the hotel and not anticipating a glimpse of Veronica he saw her face, fresh as a rose, albeit a white rose, appear between the slightly opened sun-shutters of her room.

He checked his horse as he bared his head with the sweeping gesture of a Frenchman. She waved her hand. For a moment their eyes were locked, a trembling smile parting Veronica's lips. Then quickly the shutters closed, and he rode slowly down the hill with an unsupportable sense of exile. Sorely was he tempted to turn back to investigate the secrets of life by the wide and fair highway of love rather than pursue the untrodden tracks he was setting out to trace and forge in response to the call of his manhood's rôle and duty.

Engaged by his government through the medium of a famous engineering company for a secret survey in little known regions of Turkey in Asia his going was as inevitable as it was imperative. His task though charged with zest and profound interest would be hazardous and

arduous. The isolation of unpeopled wastes lay ahead. Perils and privations would beset him, but being made of the virile yet tough stuff of which failure is rarely made he was bound in the end to win through the purpose in hand. And for the matter of that any other purpose on which his will should be bent with the same dynamic force.

Circumstances being equal his expedition was to be made as unobtrusive as possible. His few expert assistants as well as the necessary camp servants were to be his chief if not sole companions for many months to come. To attack his work in the right spirit and with the wide vitality and forcefulness of his character he must be unfettered by responsibilities of an intimate personal nature, or the sweet human ties which have a way of dispersing energy. Freedom in mind and will was an essential to success, for it was no puny task he had shouldered.

Besides it was fairer all round to Veronica. That she responded to the love he held fiercely chained in his heart he knew without any spoken assurance. Words were useless. There was that between them, now each had found the other, that could not remain hidden, and that would be deathless. But from his man's point of view it was only by silence and present rigid suppression that he was able to play the game squarely, fairly, and in all honor. And with splendid assurance he anticipated the future, an assurance which is the prime factor of successful achievement.

As he rode away with the haste of a man eager to outstrip remembrance, Veronica, slipping out of her white peignoir, crept back to bed blinded by a rush of sudden tears.

She lay for a while with tightly closed eyelids, her face to the wall, aching and desolate for the lost treasures of the might-have-been. Then youth's balm of hope stole gently over her heart with healing touch. For though Pierre was almost a stranger, she fiercely told herself, and she had as yet no real right in his life, he had said he would return.

Had he really meant it? Hope urged her to belief and confidence in spite of adverse signs. For it is always the impossible that may happen, argues the young heart, and when all seems contrary it still holds firm through thick and thin to the fighting chance in love.

Yet already with the mystic insight of the initiated she foresaw that love and sorrow must often be boon companions. That either could exist without the other experience alone could prove. Through the whole of this last day in the hills, meditation like a soft veil before her eyes held her in a little world apart, where the eyes of her soul looking out from their watch tower followed with intense longing the image of the man whose absence, more than anything else, showed how unspeakably dear he had become.

She was relieved to be going home. Life up here had suddenly lost all savor. The wonder which magnifies the smallest memory of love was upon her so that it was a torment to move among scenes provoking at every turn a rush of recollection, augmenting her sense of loss and the growing space between Pierre and herself.

This state of mental detachment stayed with her during the homeward journey. But she was not the type of girl that sits down and mopes because the man she loves is miles away and his return to her indefinite.

On the contrary, remembrance linked with hope drove



her to take up her life with a finer zest than ever before in the one-storied, green-shuttered house that was her home. It was situated behind high walls in a garden thick with foliage adjoining the hospital where Dr. Severin was chief.

Both house and hospital stood in the Christian suburb of Opella, connected by a leafy boulevard with the maze of Oriental streets, the khans of the mosques with their courts, the bazaars with their spreading expanse of flat roofs which all together made up the town, broken by cupola and minaret and cypress trees, the whole dominated by the low hill in the center crowned with its ancient castle.

Apparently a period of waiting loomed ahead for Veronica, though by no means one of inaction, for in addition to the daily routine there were many things to do in her world.

Zia's desultory lessons had to be started afresh and new ways devised to render them attractive and as little irksome as possible. Then Mme. Severin though nominally holding the household reigns was far from robust and left much of the practical management to her daughter. Not always an easy task with native servants to spur into activity, and the doctor's frequent demands on the kitchen for special cases in the hospital.

In a year's time! This was the magic formula which lent vitality to Veronica's days, and color to her busy life. Out of the constant dwelling upon a promise in which love gave her firm faith there sprang into existence that unquenchable feeling of romantic expectation intuitive to every maiden heart.

This expectation became of tangible stuff when a letter

from Pierre actually came to her. Its arrival marked time like a real event.

It was certainly no love letter, Mme. Severin assured herself emphatically, and all the better for that, as personally she had no faith that Pierre Marson would ever show his face in Opella. It would be another case of lightly come, lightly go, she calculated, in a life of rapid changes which, picking up fresh interests continually, was compelled to drop passing fancies by the way, and be apt to forget their very existence. Towards Veronica she was discreetly silent, not inciting to hope, nor yet committing the fatal mistake of crushing what she considered a gossamer fabric.

“Little mother thinks I am blind. She fears that I may be disappointed,” smiled the girl conning over the letter in which she daily discovered new and delightful meanings for every word inscribed, “but she will know the truth one day. I know it already. I am sure of it.”

During the siesta hour while the mother was lying down and Zia sleeping on her bed Veronica liked to sit with closed eyes on the shaded veranda, dreaming silently of the man she loved. At the back of many romantic pictures of the future and tingling memories there remained ever a dread of danger coming to meet him on the far-off and lonely tracks, of sickness smiting him under the hot sun of a waterless land, of men lying in wait by the wayside to rob and to kill. While musing over sorrows yet unborn her eyes would often become drenched with sudden tears, and the year of absence become magnified in anticipation to an eternity.

Suddenly and almost without warning real cause for anxiety sprang up in the rumors of war bursting upon

the city. People of every caste and creed were sick of the very name of war, that dragon more deadly than any mythical beast, which had torn men in hundreds from their families and later flung the survivors back as useless flotsam, ragged, starved, unpaid, their wounds badly tended and unhealed. The bitterness left in the wake of the Balkan war still rankled and was not likely to diminish under the increasingly heavy yoke of compulsory military service.

The Utopia predicted by the exuberant promises of the New Constitution had long gone up in smoke. The old tyranny lifted for a brief moment had dropped again with deadly grip, and become even more despotic.

Misrule and injustice showered not only over Armenians and other Christians but upon Moslems as well. Those who have lived under Turkish government know the case is fairly hopeless once Moslem himself sets out to eat Moslem.

Still in a town like Opella, removed from the coast, the full meaning of the relation of the great War to the Turkish Empire hung fire for a time. Exciting events followed one upon the other with a haste that left imagination apprehensive of worse to come. Forebodings grew apace.

## CHAPTER IV

**H**ERR OTTO ROSEN was coming to the end of a long and serious talk with Madame Severin. Her usually pale face was flushed, and there was a fitful glimmer in her pensive eyes as of the awakening of sleeping fires.

"Danger? Not of that kind, my good Otto! You cannot be serious. Turkey is bound to keep out of the war. She has bled too freely to run further risks. I will not deny my dread when the terrible outburst took us unawares, but now even Nicholas is not of your opinion. He tells me—"

"Naturally a son shows the best face of affairs to his mother," interrupted Rosen, "but I assure you under four eyes that Turkey is on the verge of entering the war on the side of Germany. Yes, on our side," he said emphatically as a skeptical exclamation escaped from Mme. Severin. "And tell me what else can she do? There is no help for her from the Powers who for years have tried to strangle her very existence. England and her Allies are thoroughly beaten by land and sea. India is in revolt, refusing any longer to be kept in servitude. Millions of Moslems there, and in Egypt, and all over the Orient, are only waiting the signal to rise and expel these outrageous tyrants. There is really only one European Power to which Oriental hearts go out in sympathy, and that Power is Germany."

"My God! What a misfortune!" groaned Mme. Severin.



“Why do you say that?” he snapped, stiffening.

“Don’t tell me you are ignorant of what a widespread uprising of the Moslems will mean?” she asked, severely, in her turn. “Do you suppose for one instant they will discriminate even between Germans and English if killing Christians becomes their one and holy duty from the Mohammedan point of view?”

“Oh, won’t they!” he said, quickly. “No fear at all of their laying hands on a person of German blood. The risk would be well known in advance. You don’t seem to realize that we are in command at Constantinople? I have already discussed the whole business with the doctor. Any day the crisis may be upon us and meanwhile all is ready. German rule will extend in a very short time from Berlin through Turkey to Bagdad and on to the Persian Gulf,” he wound up with a self-satisfied air.

“Heavens!” exclaimed the listener, less impressed than the speaker anticipated. “So the Turkish or rather Moslem notion of freedom is to exchange one set of masters for another? Ridiculous short sight on their part, or is it simply an unlimited presumption on that of Germany?”

Rosen’s face reddened at this audacious reply.

“Leave that matter,” he said, swallowing his resentment, “time will enlighten you. My point is this. Events of grave nature are at hand. The day will be here quicker than you think when only the German flag can give security. You have long known that I love your daughter. For her sake I would consider as a sacred duty, second to none, the well being and safety of all those dear to her.”

The arrogance suddenly died out of his voice, and in

its stead pleaded a solid note of sentiment which drew a responsive vibration from Mme. Severin's sensitive nature.

"Yes! yes!" she assented, slowly. "You have a kind heart when you do not take pains to hide it. I have put no obstacle in your way with regard to Veronica. On the contrary I have left you free to win her confidence and affection."

"I know you have," he said, agitatedly, "and that is why I now beg for your mediation. You can have nothing against me. My position is assured with an income that increases yearly. I can keep a wife in more than comfort. Her happiness should be my first consideration. Dear Madame, I am willing to make any concession you demand if you will only promise to use your influence with Veronica."

Anna Severin's deep eyes looked at him reflectively. A multitude of thoughts thronged her mind, the foremost being that which dwelt upon the possibility of saving Veronica the probation of the stern school of life through which she herself had been forced by fate to pass. Exiles from Russia in her youth her family had known deprivation even to hunger till the father, a doctor of repute in his own country, had fought his way into a new practice in a big provincial town of France.

Anna, educated in the local communal school, had learnt to speak French like a native. Brought up to recognize that she must work to win a livelihood she had first studied hard, and showing aptitude for a medical career her father had then sent her to pass through the usual courses in a Paris hospital. There she had met her husband, the first Nicholas Severin, enthusiastic and

an ardent patriot, imbued with the high aim in life of freeing Armenia from the Turkish yoke.

Anna, entering into his vision, put no obstacle in the way when the right moment came for him to return to the near East. Their son had been born in Paris, but was still in infant when Dr. Severin took up a post of authority in an Armenian college of Syria run by a foreign mission.

Since then long years had run out their dole of mixed joys and strangled hopes, tragic epochs and intolerable injustices. The day of established reforms so long promised by Turkey to satisfy the national aspirations of the Armenians never dawned in the lifetime of Anna's husband.

Veronica, born ten years later than Nicholas her brother, was a year old when her mother took both children to visit the grandparents in France. The professor followed when his holidays began. During their absence suddenly broke out and raged furiously those terrible massacres of 1895-96, which drew from Gladstone the fire and wrath of his last public speech. What had begun among young and ardent spirits of Armenian blood as a dream of superb freedom, leading in imitation of Russian organizations to the creation of secret societies, had merged into a nightmare of fearful intensity through continual brooding upon their country's horrible wrongs. When of a sudden an avenging spirit quickened the white heat of their fervor, and reckless of consequence these "exaltés" fired with supreme confidence the first shots in Constantinople, retribution followed with swift and sure stroke, no less than 300,000 Armenians in Asia Minor falling victims to these brutal massacres.

Nicholas Severin the elder never recovered from the shock and anguish of this blow to all his hopes of national liberty. They went back to their home when the storm was spent and the Powers once again had forced Turkey to bend to the dictates of humanity. Innumerable innocent had paid the price for the temporary madness and exaltation of the few. Relations and many close friends of the Severin family had been murdered. Promising students of the college had fallen fighting vainly for home and the emancipation of their race.

All these sleeping memories awoke and slipped swiftly as the successive pictures of a cinema film before the mental eye of Anna Severin. And as the ancient wounds began to burn shadows deepened in her steady gaze.

Her husband had died within a year of his return to Opella, of a broken heart without a doubt. In the years of her son's education and medical training, and of Veronica's school days, spent partly by the girl in France and partly in a local American school, what a retrospect of burning anxiety, of the straining of every energy of body and mind to keep together the happy home established by the father. Rather than yield a step to circumstances she had taken boarders into her house, given endless courses of French lessons in college and school and to private pupils, until finally she had gained relief after years of care through inheriting the accumulated little fortune of her parents.

To Nicholas her son had passed the reputation of his father, and also the strong silent determination never to resign his national individuality. In a real and radical deliverance from the Turkish yoke he had ceased to believe. The nation was too scattered for united effort towards emancipation. His hopes centered ever on the



recognition sooner or later by the Young Turk Party that it would only be possible for them to establish a régime of order and civilization throughout the Ottoman Empire by making use of the high intellect and superior business ability of the Armenian element.

Pictures of the hopes and enthusiasms raised by the triumph of the New Constitution, then of the fearful disillusion in the Adana and other Syrian massacres a year later, gave way in Mme. Severin's brain to one of dire foreboding for the days to come.

And if tragedies of yesterday were to repeat themselves in some near to-morrow as darkly suggested by the man before her, how could he dare to stand there and bargain cold-bloodedly for the chief treasure of her mother's heart?

Her eyes blazed with sudden fire.

"*If*—you say, Herr Rosen—*if*," she said, her mellow voice vibrating with scorn. "Why should there be any *if* in the matter? You, a representative official of a nation which boasts louder than any other of culture and true religious feeling, you can come to me and speak without blushing of an alliance with the assassins of Christians? And you even wish to make conditions for a necessity that may arise of offering the protection of your flag to a family into whose intimate circle you have been admitted, at whose board you have eaten and drunk, at whose hands you have always received unvariable kindness and welcome? Say, have you been our friend or—a time server?"

"Conditions? What do you mean? Time server! This is intolerable," stuttered Rosen, choked with anger and decided dismay at a revolt where he had looked blindly for acquiescence and even warm appreciation.

Like most aggressive natures when firmly tackled he blustered, thereby betraying that his defenses were weak and easily penetrated under a skillful attack.

"What chance of success in your wooing could you expect if Veronica guessed one iota of the kind of bargain you wish to drive with her mother?" continued Anna Severin, pressing home the advantage she saw she had gained.

"But my good Madame Severin you have utterly mistaken me," said Rosen, determined to let nothing come in the way of his unalterable resolve to win Veronica. "Under all circumstances my services would be at your disposal. It was premature for me to bring the German flag into question, for who would be more certain than myself to fly to your succor should the need arise, which God in heaven forbid? All I am begging of you is the favor of a word on my behalf with Veronica. I make no conditions, absolutely none."

"My daughter will never love any man to order," said Anna Severin. "Of that I am certain. Just as my dear parents left me free to marry where my heart was given so I intend Veronica to enjoy the same freedom."

Her words drove from Otto Rosen's mind all but the paramount idea of how to adapt love's counsel as it appealed to him to Veronica's liberty of choice in selecting the man of her heart for a husband.

"But you have nothing against me personally?" he asked, abruptly.

"No!" said Mme. Severin with decision.

"Where is she?" he asked, looking round the spacious living room with its Oriental hangings, deep divans and scattered pieces of French furniture, and then stepping up to a side table to stare at a large painted photograph

of Veronica arrayed in all the vivid bravery of an ancient Armenian costume.

Mme. Severin viewed him narrowly, her critical scrutiny charged with all that capacity for detail which a mother employs in summing up the points of a man who openly declares his love for her daughter and that an only daughter. His disclosures had given her urgent cause to think. She did not reply at once.

"Where is Veronica?" he inquired again. There was ardor in his voice. The pictured beauty of the girl had completely melted the hardness in his steel gray eyes.

"Just before you came in she drove down to the orchard with Zia and Amina to prepare for the evening meal there. Will you join us?"

"If I possibly can, but it depends upon the mails and certain telegrams I am waiting for," he replied with a hurried wrinkling of his brows, for official duty never more important, could not possibly yield place to the urgent call of the heart. He had not yet arrived at the stage where the ardor to possess and dominate becomes with men of his nature a stubborn obsession that sweeps all but the one aim aside in order to attain it.

It was true as Anna Severin declared that Nicholas had kept the worst rumors of Turkey entering the war from her knowledge, but he had no delusions himself on the matter. Mobilization was already in swing. Men were being forced to leave their homes and work. Hundreds employed on the new railroad had already laid down tools and been marched off to an unknown destination. Their place was later to be taken by victims totally unsuspecting of the fate lying in wait for them.

The town was more than ever a busy gateway of the East, teeming with traffic of all kinds. At the Interna-

tional Telegraph office in the Serai Consular Agents clamored in vain to get their messages through, receiving one uniform excuse that the wires were monopolized under Government orders. Conflicting reports leading to sharp and violent discussions in the ante-rooms added to the general suspense.

"I will go to the station," said Nicholas Severin, called from the hospital by an urgent message from his mother, "and see if I can pick up any fresh news there. The mail itself will not be in till later."

"Otto Rosen had the air of expecting important things by it," she said, anxiously. "Say, Nicholas, shall I send for the children? We can sup in the house to-night. They are in the orchard."

"No, let them be," he said, hastily. "Thrust worry aside as long as you can and as far as is possible for their sakes. I will bring on the latest news. Better still, pick me up at the hospital. You can remain in the carriage while I make enquiries in the station."

"Bien! But what is your own real opinion? Without reserve, my son!" pressed Anna Severin, clutching his arm as he turned to go.

He looked down at the tense face raised to his. Silence would but aggravate her fears, whereas knowledge of fact would tend to steady her nerves. In any case he could no longer conceal the gravity of the situation.

"Matters are serious. Turkey's doom is upon her," he said in a deep, almost prophetic voice. "It is a fatal error for her to break with her two oldest and best friends, England and France, but the German pressure is so strong she has been driven to it."

"Then it means war as Otto Rosen said, and on the wrong side," she exclaimed. "I would not credit it



though he insisted that Germany was winning all round, and her enemies had not a chance. And her enemies are our friends!"

Nicholas Severin glanced round the room. Was there an eavesdropper within hearing?

"Be careful, little mother," he said with the air of one used to caution in all his words.

"The outlook is dark," she muttered.

"Let us hope while we can," he reassured. "Meanwhile it is not necessary to provoke Rosen needlessly. There is no doubt he is in deadly earnest about Veronica. I have seen it coming for a long time. Give her a hint. It will do her no harm to be prudent, though I don't think for one moment she will entertain his proposal seriously."

"My poor France!" murmured Mme. Severin, darkly pursuing her own train of thought. "Bleeding! Suffering! It is only the beginning."

"I don't believe half we hear," Nicholas said, still confidently, though a gleam of anguish showed for an instant far down in his dark eyes. He felt that not only France was in dire peril. "Rosen told only his own views. Wait till we hear the other side. It is bound to come through sooner or later. Go and get ready now while I run back to arrange one or two matters before you call for me."

She flung her arms round him.

"My son! My dear, dear son! Be wise, and always cautious," she gasped with a half sob.

He kissed her, calling her by the old endearing names of his childhood. She calmed under his caresses, quickly regaining her composure.

"God be with you," she said suddenly in a restrained voice, pushing him gently forward.

She followed slowly to the terrace to watch him pass down the shrubbery path to the gate in the wall which communicated with the hospital. Her imagination still ran riot in those past scenes of dread and horror evoked by her conversation with Rosen.

What did the future hold?

For herself she feared nothing. The worst fate would but unite her with the beloved husband whom she mourned to-day as deeply as on the day he died. All her fear concerned her children and Zia. In any case nothing should take them unawares. They must be circum-spect and in all ways ready to face the unknown future.

And as she stood there the haggard and worried look faded from her face. Strength and calm resolution returned to her eyes. As she had done many a time before, Anna Severin resolutely closed the door of her soul to fear.

## CHAPTER V

AT the station reigned the usual Oriental Pandemonium, keyed to a shriller, more excited note than ordinary. Since the gala day of inauguration, at a recent date, there had never been such a crowd. Blazing eyes, nervous impassioned speech, enhanced vivacity, were signals of the prevailing flaming desire for news—the latest—the most definite news.

One question hovered on every lip. Was it war?

It would seem so. The only important train of the day had at last arrived, every seat and corner crowded out. From near and far away travelers of the belligerent nations were working a difficult, and in many cases, a circuitous way to the coast. Would they find a steamer in waiting was another burning question. And had the last one come and gone, leaving them stranded in an enemy's land?

Nicholas Severin alternately edged and forced a passage through the struggling masses. Hailed now and again in Turkish, in Arabic, in Armenian, he showed his intelligence and a prudent discretion more in keeping an open ear than in squandering words himself.

Suddenly a whisper was shot into his ear.

"Dr. Severin!" Then a hand gripped his arm.

He turned sharply, touched by a sense of familiarity in the voice, and found himself looking into the face of Pierre Marson.

"You, Monsieur?" he began, then stopped short in response to a muttered "Hush! No name, please!"

"Myself and none other," Marson resumed in guarded tones, "trying to rush through before the way is blocked."

"How? Where?"

"Scanderoon. A boat touches there to-morrow night, perhaps the last. There are a party of us. We have conveyances and horses in readiness. An express messenger came on in advance to engage them."

"How long do you stay here?"

"We must start in a couple of hours. Madame Severin, Mademoiselle Véronique, and the little Zia? They are well?" asked Pierre Marson, hurriedly.

Talking in rapid undertones the two men drifted into a backwash of the throng. For a moment they stood isolated under an archway while the human tide, struggling, gesticulating, shouting, surged by them.

"Two hours? You have to dine somewhere. Do so with us in our orchard. Veronica and Zia are there already. My mother herself waits for me now outside the station. Come! All will be ready."

"Is it far?" Hesitation wrestling with his desire to comply were both mirrored in the vivid glance Pierre shot at Dr. Severin.

"A short five minutes drive only."

"Where's my man?" said Pierre sharply, as he took a step forward to scan the crowd right and left. "I must know the exact time of starting and the place of rendezvous. Not for anything in the world must I miss that connection. Ah, there he is!"

On the point of raising his voice to a dark faced Syrian in Western clothes and a red fez standing against the wall a few yards away with traveling bags in hand, the words died away on Pierre's lips. On the instant his



face became void of expression as if cast in stone, and then with an ease showing prompt resource in a critical moment he turned with a brilliant smile to his companion.

"Yes, Raschid Pasha himself was my host and an excellent one. From first to last His Excellency fêted me right royally," he said, loudly, in faultless Arabic, as if in the full flow of harmless gossip. "One day he took me with him to a review of his cavalry. A magnificent display, I assure you."

He laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder as if to emphasize his remarks, but in reality there was warning in the pressure. He had seen a face he knew among the passers-by, a face in whose arrogant gaze both suspicion and curiosity mingled darkly. At last he had recognized the man for the German consul whom he had met, though scarcely spoken with, in the society of the Severin family.

It was clear to Nicholas Severin that Marson was speaking for effect. Yielding promptly to the pull of the fingers on his arm he moved away from the archway and plunged into the stream of people.

"The cavalry of His Excellency, Raschid Pasha, are without a rival," he said, enthusiastically, responding in the same vein. "Did you see that wonderful mare about which so many strange tales are told?"

They were soon blocked from sight by Marson's servant following closely at their heels in obedience to a gesture from his master.

"Dangerous man, without a doubt," commented Otto Rosen inwardly as Nicholas Severin went by apparently too absorbed to notice whom he had elbowed, "though he does not seem to be hatching mischief at this moment.

If he were not Veronica's brother I'd soon have him out of the way."

But for the recent talk with Mme. Severin and its promise of hope, and the insistent call of official duty that would take no denial at this moment, he would certainly have stopped the two men under cloak of friendship with one of them, and put many questions of an embarrassing nature.

He dismissed as improbable his first suspicion that because the fellow was in the doctor's company he was going to his house. At this critical juncture in the military situation any pause in a speedy departure would be madness to a Frenchman. And better let him be gone and out of the country than remain a prisoner to excite enhanced interest and sentiment in the bosom of a girl whom he had certainly tried to draw into a serious flirtation. Luckily Veronica was not a girl to be won by cheap methods, Rosen took time to reflect, before again applying his mind to the intricacies of German intrigue. And so complacent was he with his own worth in the girl's eyes that he had no doubt whatever as to her ultimate surrender. She would certainly be ready for love's claiming whenever he chose to insist upon a real decision.

While Nicholas guided Marson out of the crowd to the rear of the station it was swiftly planned that the dragoon should drive with them to the garden to note the locality, retaining the carriage to go off quickly to make final arrangements for the journey. He was then to come back in the vehicle hired for his master's use, provided with all that was necessary.

"It is on the direct route. No time will be lost," said Nicholas, opening the sun curtains of a low carriage

drawn up by the roadside beyond the agitated area of the station. "Mother, I bring you a visitor to supper, Monsieur Marson, whose acquaintance we made on our summer holiday. He is on his way to the port and has little more than an hour to spare. We must hurry on."

He gave a sharp order to the coachman, then followed Marson into the carriage. The driver, as the dragoman got up quickly beside him, whistled to his horses, then whipped them into a smart canter. The bells on their necks rang gayly as the carriage rolled onward in a cloud of dust between lines of plane trees and silver poplars. The road crossed the valley of orchards which stretched north and south of the town, but was now sadly disturbed by the new railway line and its ugly paraphernalia of sheds and work shops.

Events were marching, and fate already forging links to unite them with her family without any interference on her own part, was Mme. Severin's rueful reflection as with surprise but cordiality she greeted Pierre Marson.

"More than my compatriot," she added warmly. "My heart is with France, Monsieur. You must be careful. If war be a certainty, as people declare, can you manage to escape detention before reaching the coast?"

"No difficulty, dear Madame," he said. "My *teskereh* is without a flaw, and I hold besides an extra pass signed by no less a personage than Raschid Pasha. Even if the fatal break has already occurred nothing can stop me. I go straight through. I could even brave Constantinople itself."

"God be thanked!" said Anna Severin, thinking more of Veronica than the man before her. For intuition at once flew to the motive inspiring Marson's appearance

with Nicholas. Her heart warmed to him forgetting its burden of foreboding while she listened to a rapid summary of his plans. Her woman's eye the while was quick to note with revived interest Marson's resolute but fine profile, the keen bright eye, the slender muscular grace of the figure bending towards her. He was decidedly the best type of Frenchman—*de race*—was her lightning reflection, and flecked with just that touch of the dare-devil which is fascinating to many women.

The garden of the Severins was in true Oriental fashion a plantation of fruit trees of many varieties, and flowering shrubs stretching behind high stone walls from the highway to the edge of a small limpid river. Wide spreading and leafy branches of a group of mulberry trees which threw their shade half over the water and half over the sandy soil, overhung the garden pavilion in which a table was set out for the evening meal.

An odor of cooking emanated from a small lean-to where a native woman of fifty, dark-skinned and black eyed, presided over a brazier, a briskly boiling crock and a griddle.

"They'll be here before you are ready, I know they will," cried Zia through the trellis work at intervals. "Amina, do you hear?"

"Rest thy mind with thy legs, little mother of haste. All in its own time, even the hour of the evening meal," came soothingly from within as Amina made busy among her dishes and pots, muttering under her breath the Arabic equivalent for "Bless the child! Why she can't let me be?"

"I tell you the hour is late. Hurry, lazy one! And where is the clotted cream? Oh, what a scolding you'll get! I never saw such a slow coach."



"You will teach me to cook, little wise one? That is good, but wait till to-morrow comes. To-day the time to learn is short," said Amina, imperturbably.

"Vronka! Aunt Vronka! Why do you stay so long with Ali? Tell him to go quickly. I want you."

Zia's voice was fretful. She had tired herself out with play and now exhausted was lying stretched out on a divan at the entrance of the garden house. Alternately her head turned restlessly to peer through the vine foliage and fling words at Amina, and to call out to Veronica who stood on the river bank looking at something below.

"I am coming, Zia, in a minute," she called over her shoulder, then bent forward again to speak to a slim young Arab arranging himself and various possessions in a small boat. "Tell Zorah I will ride over and see her to-morrow. Have you all the packages in safety? You must hurry or the night will overtake you."

"Maleish! The darkness has no fears for me."

"Of course not. Are you not a son of the Weldeh?"

"By Allah, it is so! It is the truth," said the young man, simply. "Now I am ready. Peace be with you!"

"And to you peace, Sheikh Ali! God give you safe journey," responded Veronica, as pressing an oar against the bank he thrust out into the stream and started to row.

She stood looking after him with grave eyes thinking hard of things he had told her. He had come to the orchard from the town to bring a message from his sister, the Arab wife of the Englishman, John Culver, who was brother-in-law to Nicholas. Zorah, having matters of importance to confide to her, wished to see her at El-Fereidus as soon as possible.

At any other time Veronica would have guessed that

these matters concerned such vital news as the baby's new tooth. But to-day Ali had told her of various rumors in the Sukhs and had hinted, with Arab ambiguity and suggestion, of strange happenings that a declaration of war would disclose.

"Yes, I am stupid. No doubt I shall ever be stupid in the eyes of my little wise one," replied the patient Amina to further reproof from her small tyrant, "but wait till her teeth of ivory bite into the honey cake I am baking for her alone."

"Oh, Amina! A honey cake and all for me? I love you for it. I will—" Zia broke off, sat up in a listening attitude and then called out shrilly, "Little aunt, they are coming, they are here. But some one is with them. I hear voices. It is a stranger—a tall, dark man."

She slipped to her feet and limped off through the trees.

Veronica started at her words and looked back as if hearing distant familiar sounds.

A stranger! Some one Zia did not know. Yet no, the child's voice already rang out in excited words of recognition and greeting.

During the weeks immediately following the outbreak of the great European war a look of waiting that was almost suspense had settled into Veronica's eyes. They had taken on a habit of looking up at the sound of every fresh footstep, and at the opening of the door. Of Pierre Marson she had talked confidentially and anxiously with her mother, wondering if and how the news had gone through to him, and whether he had gone back to France.

She had been wracked by suspense and dread con-

cerning his safety, and the uncertainty of whether under the new terrible conditions of war she would ever see his face again.

Then suddenly her mood had become dumbly quiescent as if yielding involuntarily to the inherited strain of fatalism in her veins. Now at a rush all the early fever of unrest was back again. Without a moment's warning a cloud of the unexpected was moving straight upon her. Scarcely could she summon courage to face it. For a few seconds she remained still and tragic as a figure of the sphinx.

Suddenly she paled, giving a little inarticulate cry, paused uncertainly on the edge of the river bank for a few more breathless seconds, then turned and walked slowly forward. For though her eyes might deceive her she too had heard a voice, a voice that almost made her heart stop beating, and then start to beat faster than ever before. And now she glowed from head to foot. Then all at once she heard her mother speaking to her as if from a great distance away.

"It is none other than Monsieur Marson, my child. Just looking in upon us for a short hour before continuing his journey to Scanderoon. The supper must be served immediately," and at that Mme. Severin hurried off to Amina.

Night and day for what had seemed an eternity Pierre Marson's brain had been filled to bursting with the nightmare of a France in arms, of France, his beloved France, in dire straits, of France overrun with wolves and assassins, of his own absence in this appalling crisis, of the maddening distance to cover before he could get back with certain valuable information in his possession.

Yet now as his eyes fell on Veronica, for a moment it

seemed there was a great burst of sunlight across that troubled world of his vision. All difficulties lifted. He felt that by some magic he had been suddenly transported to a place of joy and peace, that the pictures of battles, death, and disaster painted by imagination and rumor, were no longer real.

In the expression of Veronica's eyes as she came to meet him fear and joy were strangely blended. And there was something behind, a kind of veiled light.

Pierre made his way towards her as though the meeting had been pre-arranged by some dim decree of fate—who shall say it was not? He saw the light in her eyes, and a quick flush on her cheeks as of the early dawn. With a smile he concealed his deep inward agitation as they met face to face and shook hands with apparent calmness, and for a moment stood looking at each other. A thousand things left unsaid seemed to be understood between them. For love is never so eloquent as when it is dumb.

It was worth it, flashed through his mind, just this one moment of complete understanding eye to eye, worth all the risks imaginable. He was glad he had come, how glad he scarcely dared admit. For though his soul was on fire with patriotic fervors, and every nerve steeled to the paramount importance of speed and secrecy in getting out of Syria he felt that this brief interlude of reunion would inspire him to act hereafter with the strength of ten. For his love for Veronica now stood revealed with flashlight certainty as a something splendid and enveloping, a something transcending all emotion and passion he had ever experienced. In a word it was the grand passion which comes once and once only in a lifetime.



"Ah!" said Veronica, speaking with an effort at last. "You—you have come, after all."

"After all? I never intended to do anything else but come," he said with the fire that marked his utterance, as he raised her hand to press it to his lips, kissing it with all a lover's ardor.

Nicholas Severin looked at them both searchingly, then wheeled sharply round, hastily calling Zia's attention to his pockets.

She fell upon them as to a favorite game full of perennial surprises. Slowly, imperceptibly, diverting her all the time by word and gesture, he drew her to the little vine-overhung pavilion where his mother was adding another cover to the table after ordering supper to be served on the minute.

"How did you happen to meet him?" she asked, hurriedly.

Nicholas explained.

"I wish you had missed each other," she added, speaking in Turkish on account of the child. "She might have forgotten him then. And yet—"

"Till this instant I hadn't an idea that it was a serious affair between the two, though now it is plain enough to be seen," he said, his forehead wrinkling in deep lines.

"He is of my dear, adopted country," she continued with the anxious look of one who looks ahead of the present moment. "If there had been no war all would have been well. But there! It is destiny which will not be denied. My poor girl! And he leaves so soon. Who knows if we shall ever see him again!"

"You speak of the matter as a foregone conclusion. We still have Rosen to reckon with," said the doctor, abstractedly.

"No, Zia, you must wait a moment. Veronica is coming directly."

Zia had dragged her chair to the table and was calling loudly to Amina.

"Naughty girl!" exclaimed the grandmother. "Is that the way to behave when a guest is here?"

"I am hungry," declared Zia, tossing her curls over her shoulders, and beginning to thump the table with a fork. "Aunt Veronica is always talking to somebody when I want her to come. First it was Ali," here Mme. Severin and her son exchanged a rapid look of enquiry, "and now Monsieur Marson. It is my turn to talk now and to eat. I am hungry."

A wave of shyness swept over Veronica at the touch of Pierre's lips on her hand. She trembled under the fire of his absorbing look. Its message burned itself into her heart.

The scents of aromatic shrubs and herbs saturated the air. Everywhere sounded the shrill chirping of grasshoppers and the drowsy drumming of winged insects. Somewhere near breathed the cooing note of a pigeon. The calm of approaching sunset was over the land.

A little idyll of Eden was being enacted in one small garden of an earth which elsewhere was being wracked with war and all its horrors. The one man had found the one woman made to be his mate. He knew it. She felt it. Both were suddenly caught up by the power moving them into a state that lies entirely outside time.

"You knew that I could not go away without seeing you again?" he whispered.

"And I, too, wished very much to see you," said Veronica, softly, with a little break in her voice.

Overcome by his emotions and the stringent need for

holding them on the curb, Pierre drew himself up with a sharp movement and gazed fixedly over the river. He saw nothing that was visibly before his eyes for the moment. For the sting of a bitter reality was pricking him hard. He was on the verge of placing the width of Europe between himself and the girl he loved. How could he bear to leave her behind in a land under the power of the Turk, who was fast becoming the enemy of France as none knew better than himself?

His face was colorless beneath the dark tan of his cheeks as he turned suddenly and took her hand. His eyes were shining.

"I must not say what to-day I have no right to say," he said, speaking with difficulty. "France is calling me. She has the greatest need of all her children. They must put every thing behind them except duty and love to her. I dare not delay a day, scarcely an hour to tell you all that is in my heart—but—when and if—I come back, Veronica," he broke off, looking deep into her eyes, which big and darkly blue were regarding him steadfastly.

"Have no fear! I will wait for you to the end of my life," she said simply, in a full firm voice.

As she spoke these words a great calm fell upon both. For it is only doubt, and the failure of the word of certainty that stirs into a state of gnawing unrest the heart's hidden wealth of love. That a man's mind was not unlikely to change during an indefinite absence when things would be moving with impetuous rapidity never entered Veronica's head. And that the look in her eyes could ever shed its glow of tenderness on another man than himself was also an impossible thought. Fidelity and love at that moment were interchangeable realities.

Mme. Severin came to the doorway of the pavilion to look out into the garden. As if her eyes were dazzled by the golden sunlight piercing the foliage she made a screen of her hand above them. For a moment she stood there silent and watchful with a growing ache at her heart. All the yearning of motherhood's prescience was in her gaze.

Then she called in a caressing voice, "Veronica! Supper is served."



## CHAPTER VI

COFFEE had been served. Zia had gone off with Amina to feed various animal pets in the garden.

Involuntarily the circle at the table drew closer together. Tension strung the moments taut. Nerves tingled, though any show of emotion was rigidly suppressed. Their voices were low as of those who speak in confidence and have much to compress into swiftly flying time.

Pierre Marson had touched on the difficulty of choosing a route home. Whether to strike down the river to the Persian gulf and thence to France by way of the Red Sea, or to journey hurriedly through Syria to a Levantine port. His eyes, vivacious and dark, darting from one to the other of his listeners and returning ever to look with intensity at Veronica's absorbed face, indicated that something stronger than a choice of longer or shorter route, or greater or lesser danger had brought to a head his decision to pass through Opella.

Now they were rid of the child he sketched in curt, telling words the unrest of the districts he had passed through. In the East conviction never waits upon evidence, and rumors spreading from the vast sounding board of Islam were reverberating in every village, in every nomad camp, in every caravan of travelers, all magnified and greatly distorted by reason of their medium of a myriad voices and as many opinions.

Strong traces of a German propaganda of hostility to

France, England and Russia he had found everywhere. Evil insinuations were rife that all three powers were working hand in hand to keep millions of Orientals in slavery, and at one dire, united stroke to destroy Islam.

"We have sucked the Orient dry to our own sole advantage is what these rascally Germans say," said Marson, his voice shaken by resentment and sharp with anger, "and that we have simply exploited the land for our own benefit. I tell you, doctor, the atmosphere I have come through is inflammable with hot suspicions against the Entente Powers. God knows how and where to find the right counteractive. I burn with anxiety to get back and disclose all I know in the right quarter. And after that I should not be one whit surprised to be sent back again at express speed."

He pressed his lips tightly together as if he could have said much more, but refrained. A certain hardness came into his face. His eyes were like steel.

Veronica's eyes widened and her lips parted. A stimulating warmth ran through her veins, melting the chill which Pierre's approaching absence had pierced her heart. She bent forward clasping her hands as she looked at Pierre, quite unaware of the tenderness in her face. But in a minute this look was chased by another expressing solicitude, vivid wonder and a growing suspense.

"How? That is not possible," exclaimed Nicholas, shortly.

"Not possible? My friend, you little know me or my resources," retorted Pierre, almost boyishly, his eyes sparkling as he leaned over the table and still further lowered his tones, "and I guarantee that the next time

we run across each other as to-day you will pass me by without the least recognition. Remember I was brought up in the East. To this day my father's name as a hakim of miraculous healing power is one to conjure with in Bagdad and its whole district. Did I tell you that Raschid Pasha himself went out of his way to pay me unnecessary attentions?"

"Such attentions hide wheels within wheels. Oftener than not they are the prelude to something sinister," said Nicholas. "Never trust them!"

"I know, I know! Intrigue is their food and drink. You can teach me nothing there. What I mean is this. Turkey has no real quarrel with me, a Frenchman, Turkey has no desire to go to war with France. It is only our mortal enemy, Germany, trying to attack us from another quarter."

Mme. Severin and her son exchanged a quick glance, Otto Rosen and his blatant assertions springing spontaneously to the minds of both.

"Germany's policy in the East has long been an open secret," said Nicholas. "She poses as the protector of Turkey, especially at this moment. It is with that same policy the Entente Powers must reckon to-day, that above all."

"And a policy she will stick to whatever happens I expect," put in Pierre, bitterly. "The violators of Belgium will jib at nothing."

"Yes, there is not the least doubt that they support the New Turk Party, which favors them on account of their own absolute confidence in the greater future of Germany."

Pierre Marson gave a contemptuous little laugh.

"The Kaiser made that choice long ago," he said,

shortly, "and sealed it in that memorable embrace of Abdul Hamid on the steps of the Bosphorus palace. He made himself an ally of the Red Sultan simply to encourage his own importance in the near East."

"Be careful, my friend," said Mme. Severin. "Hard experience has taught us never to utter such sentiments even in a whisper, whatever we hide in our hearts."

"Pardon, dear madame," he said, hurriedly, with a pleading glance. "Let us come back to ourselves. Tell me exactly how you stand with regard to this crisis," turning to speak directly to Dr. Severin. Acute anxiety showed in both voice and look.

"You see it will not be a war of patriotism for us. How could we fight with a willing heart against France and her Allies? It will be nothing but a struggle against that very Liberty for which we have striven and suffered for years. Do you know," Nicholas, speaking rapidly in a highly nervous tone, now lowered his voice to a whisper, "news has come through secretly that six hundred Armenians of Paris and America are already enrolled as volunteers in the French Army?"

"Bravo!" ejaculated Pierre.

"Our people are brave as lions, but you know in this land they have no arms," continued the doctor, bitterly, "and if they had they lack training and discipline."

"No arms to act independently, you mean, Nicholas," put in Veronica, quickly, a depth of passion thrilling in her words, for she, too, was imbued with no small measure of the spirit of her father.

"Yes, yes, for since the obligation of military service has been extended to Christians, our youngest and strongest men are placed in the active army of Turkey."

"Of course in ordinary times it is only fair the



Christians should help the Moslems to bear the burden of war," said Pierre, "but it will go terribly against the grain for you to side with Turkey against the great Powers which have always been your friends, and are now waging war for liberty."

"Liberty and Progress!" exclaimed Mme. Severin, carried beyond her usual caution. "The false cry of our tyrants, but never from the beginning have they held to its promise. I was in Beyrout on my way to France to visit my parents at the time of the festivities which were held to celebrate the new era of Liberty and Progress. I was an eye witness to the apparent reconciliation of Moslem, Christian and Jew. Moslem ulemas and Christian priests embraced in the open street. They drove through the town side by side in the same carriage. My heart was heavy. The reality of this millennium of peace among so many jarring elements seemed a farce. My presentiments were true enough, for in less than a year the sole reward of Armenian loyalty and fidelity to the new government was massacre, terrible and bloody massacre. Once again we lost many friends and relatives. They were murdered, foully murdered."

Veronica pulled her chair close up to her mother.

"There, there, little Mother! Do not speak of it. You will make yourself ill," she said, putting her arm round the older woman's shoulder.

"Yes, Monsieur Marson, and you would hardly believe that even after the heart breaking disillusion at Adana my husband's martyred race still remained faithful to Turkey," continued Anna Severin with a hurried staccato utterance showing how deeply she was moved. "During the Balkan war Turkey had no soldiers more devoted and loyal and courageous than her Armenian

subjects. God alone knows what will be the issue if these same faithful souls are dragged into a war against their conscience and against every sane notion of liberty. If they rebel—" she raised her hands with an expressive gesture.

"All my unhappy country has wanted or demanded at any time has been security of life with some kind of protection of our national goods by a kind of autonomy. Nothing more!" said Nicholas with a gloomy fieriness.

"In one word, life, and freedom to live it," said Pierre, emphatically.

His eyes, full of thoughts, with a quick intentness in their gaze, rested first on one then on the other. He was reflecting rapidly, being a man to make rapid conclusions and then draw up a definite plan to meet them. With presentiments hammering at his heart he looked fixedly at Veronica, whose protective attitude towards her mother filled him with a passion of yearning. Of her grave deep blue eyes, soft and luminous in the waning light, he saw chiefly the gaze suggested under a sweep of straight dark eyebrows.

"I am going to propose something startling," he said suddenly, bending forward and speaking quietly though every word was clear. "It is this. That you all leave Opella with me this very night and come back to France, your true foster mother. That you leave all without looking back, without regret. Take nothing into account except the fact that to-morrow may be too late. Don't speak yet! Think it over! Consider well that my proposal is no idle suggestion. The fact that I make it proves my personal serious view of the situation. Be advised! Come!"

Veronica, suddenly white and trembling, held her

breath in an anguish of suspense. Her gaze hung spell-bound on the vivid face of her lover. Then she turned and stared at her brother while her arm still clasping her mother tightened unconsciously.

With startled attention Nicholas Severin followed Pierre's speech. A quivering light leaped to his eyes. His mother looked only at him. When Pierre ceased to speak but still tried to compel them to his will with the eagerness of his gaze, she touched her son on the arm.

"Speak, Nicholas! It is for you to reply," she said, tersely.

"Not possible!" he ejaculated, abruptly, his face setting firmly though his sensitive nostrils quivered. "Run away from my father's people? Leave my sick to their fate? Prove by my own flight the disloyalty tacked on under every pretext to the Armenians? In my turn, my friend, I can say you do not know me. You cannot tempt me. You do not realize what you ask. It is the impossible. I am neither a coward nor a deserter."

Pierre Marson colored hotly. He got up hastily and went to the doorway as if to gain self-mastery over sudden upwelling emotions.

Veronica raised her hand to her eyes and dashed away two bright drops that threatened to roll down her cheeks. Nicholas looked sternly before him. Mme. Severin got up and began with nervous fingers to arrange a basket of fruit for her guest to carry away for the journey.

The tragedy underlying her recent words was still present to Pierre's mind as he gazed unseeingly over the garden. Standing there the air seemed heavy with portent. The swift shortening of the moments spent with Veronica came to him with sickening realization.

He was seized with horrible fear, fear of hideous evil lying in wait in that vague and agitated future. If only he could have taken her away with him, just have flung around her an enveloping mantle and carried her off like a Bedouin his newly made bride. With that mad passionate desire uppermost pressing all other considerations aside a second inspiration came to him.

He turned with decision and came back to the table.

"Pardon me, mon bon ami," he said, putting his hand on the doctor's shoulder. "You are perfectly right. I see your point of view and admire your courage. But you have a mother, a daughter, a sister, for whom at any moment the position may be suddenly serious. And how can a man either work or fight at his best when he knows his womenfolk are in danger? It is best to be prepared. Trust them to my care! Be wise in advance," he paused impressively, imbued by his own words with a growing sense of the necessity for prompt action. "The carriage coming for me will accommodate them as well. I will be their faithful escort. Nothing shall harm them. I swear that—"

"No, Monsieur Marson, no! We could not leave my son alone," interrupted Anna Severin, very pale and still, while her eyes, proud and fond, looked steadily at Nicholas.

Dumbly Pierre turned to Veronica.

Her face grew white and tense under the appeal of his eyes. She shook her head unable to speak. He could not and would not accept finality in this wordless reply, and dropped into the empty seat beside her. He took her hand and pressed it as a man does when urging a vital point that lies very near his heart.

"Try to persuade them with me," he said in a voice



that was abrupt and hoarse. "The time is very short, but it can be done. We can hasten the speed."

"I must stay with Mother and Nicholas, of course. Nothing else is possible," she said at last, trying to keep her lips from trembling. "We cannot go away without him. Beside, Zia might be ill and he alone understands how to treat her. No, it is not possible."

Pierre was not too blinded by his fears of future perils to feel with intuition that only a sense of duty would sway the girl to action one way or the other. As this sense of duty weighed in the scale of decision against his advice he knew it was now hopeless to persist. But he felt sick inwardly at the thought of the girl's fragrant beauty blooming on the stormy background of war in surroundings where dangers would be of a nature at once more brutal and insidious than in the Western arena.

For not yet had the full toll of German atrocities in Belgium and on his own native soil come to his knowledge. Their horror was to strike like a barbed arrow into his soul at a later hour.

Tension seemed at breaking point. Emotion of various forms inflated every heart. Upon Veronica and Pierre the darkening shadow of separation had a numbing effect.

Suddenly Nicholas Severin stirred, throwing off his stern abstraction. He looked around with his normal quiet but genial expression, then stretched out his hand to take a cigar from an open case on the table. Deliberately he struck a light.

"We are walking out to meet imaginary trouble," he said. "Let us face the facts. In case of war my work will go on as usual, but its output will be doubled, perhaps trebled."

"You may be attached to an Army Medical unit for active service," put in Pierre, promptly.

"Not at all likely. My hospital is so well adapted for the purpose that I am quite sure it will be utilized as a base military hospital. I shall need all the help I can get."

"Another reason we cannot desert my son," said Mme. Severin, addressing Pierre. "We must have no worry about Zia. Our kitchen will supplement more than ever the needs of the patients. My daughter is not only a good nurse but has learnt to dispense when the doctor is overworked."

"Then all your efforts are to be used for the benefit of Turks and Germans," said Pierre in a sarcastic voice as the personality of Herr Rosen flashed across his mind. "I forgot certainly that you might always rely, in case of necessity, upon the good-will of that German consul you know so well."

"That is true," said Nicholas, calmly.

"Nicholas! What are you saying? Rely on the enemy of France? Never!" exclaimed Veronica with sudden heat, and then overcome almost to tears by the surprised glance of her brother and the eager joy with which Pierre turned to look into her face, she got up and went hurriedly into the garden.

"Of course all our hopes were centered on France and England," Nicholas resumed in a strained voice. "Now these are crushed by the probable entrance of Turkey into the war against them it will be chiefly to America we shall look in any hour of danger. The United States consul of Opella is as good a friend of ours as Herr Rosen."

"I am glad to hear it, my friend," said Pierre, dryly,

as he looked at his watch. "I fear the carriage is already waiting. It is more than time for me to be getting on."

"I will go at once and see," said Dr. Severin, jumping up.

Left alone Pierre Marson cast an eager, scrutinizing look into the garden, then turned with an impulsive gesture to Mme. Severin, and took her hands.

"Mother of Veronica, I love your daughter. If I come safely through the war will you be my mother also?" he asked with simplicity, not ashamed to look into her face with dimmed eyes.

She returned his gaze with a gravity that studied him. Then with a curious little glow in her eyes she said, "If Veronica herself wishes it, but till then you must wait to ask her. Who can read the future?"

He glanced quickly at her with anxiety in his eyes.

"She will remember?" he said, earnestly.

"Can you ask?" she returned, significantly.

He stooped, kissed her hands, then drew himself up, straightened his shoulders with a resolute gesture and went out of the pavilion.

Voices guided his steps. Round the bend of the path he came to an open space between the trees. Zia stood there, a basket in her hand, her fair curls falling in a tangle over one shoulder as she looked up at Veronica with delight in her delicate face.

"Here they come! Now!" she shouted, gleefully.

Veronica was standing still with her head up and well back. She held both her hands extended filled with grain, and uttered a little cooing call with her throat.

A number of pigeons came wheeling down from the trees around and tumbled about the girls, pigeons of

varied soft-hued plumage with curious nostrils, both swelled and rough. They perched confidently on Veronica's shoulders, wrists, and even her head, filling the air with their tender cooing notes, and began industriously to pick up the grain.

The blood mounted to Pierre's face. He drew a long breath, gazing with a wild passion of wistful despair at the beautiful sight. As he hurried toward the spot he heard Mme. Severin's voice.

"Zia, I am going to the garden door with a bag of fruit for Monsieur Marson. I want you to help me."

"It is finished," said Veronica, scattering the remainder of the grain on the ground. "Run to Mémé and give me the basket."

Eager for the new diversion Zia ran off at once. Veronica was holding one of the birds in the hollow of her neck and stroking it gently. The pigeon, dove-colored, and with large bright eyes, pecked at her blouse, but seemed well content to be fondled.

"I am going to put my little Zuleika in a basket for you to take away with you," she said, speaking to Pierre as if he had been with her all the time. He saw as she looked round at him that her eyes were full of unshed tears.

"The pigeon? Is it yours? How I shall prize it!" he said, earnestly.

"It is not to carry over the sea," she added, quickly. "It is for you to send back here from Scanderoon. She has often made the journey. When she comes back she will tell us you are safe."

"Veronica!"

"Please raise the cover and I will put her inside the basket. See, it is all ready with a little store of grain



and water at the corners. Just here under the wing is the place to fasten a little note."

"How long will the bird be flying back to you?" he asked in a husky voice, holding the basket while Veronica deftly transferred the pigeon to its snug nest and immediately fastened it in.

Pierre, overcome by the nearness and dearness of her, was fast losing his composure. The absolute certainty of Veronica's love had transported him on the instant into that condition of mind, desperate and agitated, which threatens by one mad single impulse to cut all apart from a man's life but the absorbing love of an individual and make a complete volteface. Honor, patriotic ardor, self sacrifice, were being tossed as leaves of no account on the love current, unruly and relentless as a river in spate, which raced through his veins.

"About eight to ten hours," said Veronica in a faint voice, ever swift to feel the effect of mental atmosphere and never more so than at this moment.

At that critical juncture a voice called out of the distance. "The carriage waits and the driver is in a hurry to be off."

Like a soldier called to attention Pierre drew himself up stiffly. But still he looked at Veronica. He was struggling with a new weakness, the sense of helplessness which comes to one in face of the inevitable. How was he going to say good-by?

Veronica herself relieved the strain for both by walking in the direction of the voice. Mechanically he paced by her side, his face becoming grave and fixed as suddenly he remembered Mme. Severin's words.

The girl stopped short at the last bend of the path and turned to him. She could not face the parting at the

gate with spectators around. The color came and went in her face. Her lips beginning to tremble she resolutely set them firm.

"Go quickly! Every minute is precious on such a journey," she said with a brave look in her blue eyes revealing that whatever peril or trial might lie ahead at any rate the spirit within her would quail before neither. "May God protect you on the way, and preserve you in danger!" she added in an Eastern strain. "Always in my heart I shall pray for you."

She found it impossible to articulate another word. Something throbbing in her throat was choking her. But with a strenuous effort she preserved her control, looking into his face with calm and tender eyes.

He took the little basket containing the pigeon from her outstretched hand. Then he put his arm round her and kissed her on the lips, the eyes, the hair. For a moment he held her clasped as though he must hold her and never part from her all his life long.

"I shall love you forever," he said, hoarsely, and then sped away, not daring to pause for another second.

Before disappearing between the trees he looked around as if conscious that the moment was to be one of the indelible memories of his life.

The last sight of Veronica was of a tall graceful figure, finely molded in all its lines, a still face of ivory pallor set in a nimbus of hair black as night. She stood silhouetted for an instant against the sky showing between the trees, then she turned to hide the tears streaming down her cheeks and walked quickly away.

## CHAPTER VII

A CLOUD of dust far up the road, a faint and ever fainter jingling of bells gave back to the group watching at the garden door the last sign of Pierre Marson's flying visit to Opella. A glance into the carriage so swiftly disappearing from sight would have showed him gazing with a fixed persistency into space, the cigar lighted before starting dying out between his fingers. Before the concentrated eye of the mind one image only was visible, the figure of Veronica as she had last appeared to him, with the deep blue eyes of her brimming with love and purest devotion. God help her, and God help him, too, in the days to come, was the predominating thought as the sword of separation pierced ever deeper into his heart.

Dr. Severin declared he must not delay longer, he must go back to the hospital.

"Then take Zia with you," said Mme. Severin. "Amina has gone home and will put her to bed. I have various things to put by. Veronica and I will return together."

"Yes, I am tired," said Zia, languidly, and held out her arms to her father.

"Send the carriage straight back, Nicholas," called Mme. Severin as her son drove towards the town.

The keeper of the garden came forward from his mud-brick hut close to the strong door in the wall to detain her in talk for a few moments. Then she went back with hasty and eager steps to the pavilion.

"Veronica, are you there?" she said, anxiously, halting on the threshold to peer into the shadowed room.

No answer gave back from within or through the soft freshness of the evening air without. With a heavy sigh she entered, picked up various articles lying about and thrust them with an air of detached thought into a massive chest. This she locked and put the key into a bag at her side.

For a moment she stood pondering, a wistful look in her far-seeing eyes. Then she went down to the river bank, looked hurriedly right and left, and out over the deepening waters and immediately turned aside into a little path winding through the trees.

"Veronica!" she called again.

The pigeons were still murmuring somewhere out of sight. When she came out on the clearing where Veronica had put Zuleika into the basket she found the birds, some moving on the ground, others in the air, all uttering their cooing notes to a slim white figure standing among them still as a statue with arms taut and fingers tightly locked before her.

"It is a big struggle, my little daughter," said Mme. Severin, quietly, coming up behind her, "but courage! You will win through."

A moment's silence and then the girl turned slowly and looked with tragic eyes at her mother.

"But it is hard," she said in a gasping voice, spreading out her hands in mute appeal to the fate upon her.

The passionate strain of her attitude suddenly snapped beneath the tenderness of her mother's presence. She dropped in a heap to the ground, bowed her head into her arms and began to weep bitterly.

In a moment Mme. Severin was kneeling beside her.



In the relief of free outward expression of her grief Veronica sobbed out her heart on her mother's breast, and with it wept away most of the strain and bitterness of that parting hour.

Soon she began to listen to the words whispered in her ear.

"My heart is sore for you, my dear one. It is hard to love and to part in the same hour, but love is a master that will not be denied when called up by the voice of destiny. For it is destiny herself who has arranged all this mixed happiness and pain, in order to mold you to her will. She knows that through the giving of love to faithful hearts she will be able to bring certain things to pass in your life, things hidden from us now but that the future will make plain."

"But why must destiny be cruel?" muttered the girl.

"Out of what seems cruel to-day you will one day see good springing like a flower. For love and a brave heart can go far in conquering the evil of what seems the most adverse destiny. Many experiences go to the molding of a life. If you submit to them you can often turn them to your advantage."

"I did struggle hard to persuade myself that all would be well," said the girl, sitting up with a sort of desperate gasp and pushing with one hand the soft black hair from her forehead, "that no harm could possibly happen to—him—that nothing dare happen to him, that we shall still go on at home in the same placid old way, and that one day—he will come back."

"Try to believe by all means that everything happens for the best," said the mother earnestly, "but life at home for us, my Veronica, is going to be a grave matter, needing all our courage."

"I know! I know! I was not able even to pretend that my hope would come true," said Veronica, dully; "only one comfort I have—Pierre might have gone without saying a word, and then everything would have been unbearable."

Anna Severin's eyes flashed.

"I told him to wait," she said, quickly, "that you were not to be tied by a promise."

"If he had not spoken I should have drowned myself in the river," said Veronica with passion in her voice. "It makes all the difference in being able to endure anything and everything just to have heard him say it once."

"My dear!" murmured her mother in a gentle but expostulating voice.

"From my heart I mean it," Veronica's voice thrilled to a deep note, "for I know! I know! And when one knows it is possible to endure all things. You shall see!"

She had spoken with decided ardor of expression, gazing with a far off uplift of look into the growing darkness under the trees. Now, as suddenly, she dropped her face into her hands, overcome by the feeling that in the dawning of her great and amazing happiness a thick cloud had fallen blotting out the glory. In spite of her brave words emptiness and despair were ready and even eager to creep into her heart.

Anna Severin drew up the shawl which had slipped from her shoulders and rose to her feet. Wrapping her arms more closely she stood erect looking down silently at the girl.

Veronica's love for the Frenchman—she thanked God for his nationality—which had come so suddenly had made a new being of her little girl. This was a woman

grown who was speaking. Ah, well, such a crisis was bound to come from the very nature of things. Fate had declared her will. From this reading of life nobody who has the smallest strain of Oriental blood in their veins is ever free.

"And now we must go home, Veronica," she said, firmly. "You must try to compose yourself even as Pierre made the effort when he came to bid us good-by at the gate."

Veronica looked up with arrested eyes. "Yes?" she said in a questioning voice. "Yes?"

"His self control was marked. It had to be. But I knew he was inwardly as deeply moved as yourself. He cannot, he must not give way. He belongs to his country, though he will serve her the better for loving you with all his heart. Now, listen to me, dear! You, too, have other aims to consider. We have to be exceedingly cautious, and above all to keep strict silence about the love between you and Pierre however difficult it may be to conceal it."

With parted lips Veronica listened with the same look of fixed attention. Directly her mother finished speaking she sprang up.

"Tell me all!" she said with instant intuition. "There is something else, I know. I will be selfish no longer, *petite mere*."

"Come then! Let me draw your lace scarf over your hair and round your neck. The carriage waits. I will explain as we walk."

With tender touch Anna Severin smoothed the girl's disarranged hair, and arranged over it and round the neck the lace in the Syrian fashion, concealing as much of the face as possible as it was growing dark. She

kissed Veronica on either cheek and then taking her arm they went away.

As they walked Anna spoke of Herr Rosen's visit that afternoon, explained his ominous news, his dark hints of future disaster, and above all his declaration of love and confident hopes.

"Have you told Nicholas?" was Veronica's first question.

"Yes!"

"He knew all this and yet refused to listen to Pierre? Oh, mother!"

"Your brother is like his father. When he sees the right he does it and never swerves."

"That is your way, too," said Veronica in a toneless voice. "What must I do? How can I face that man again knowing his preposterous ideas about me? You know that I could never have loved him even had I never seen Pierre."

"I felt you were not at all in sympathy with him, but on no account must we make him our enemy."

"The very thought of him repels me," said Veronica, fiercely. "How can he dare take so much for granted?"

"Simply a good share of the confidence and unbounded conceit common to most Germans," said Anna Severin, dryly. "They are out to make trouble if war really starts afresh. I doubt even if they will in any way make things easier for the Christians of this land in spite of their boast of religion."

Veronica started as the words recalled something forgotten to her mind.

"Ali was with me before you came this evening," she said breathlessly. "The Sukhs are filled with dark reports that the Bedouin are rising. Already the Jihad



is being preached among them. I told him to take no notice of it seriously. We have so often heard similar reports."

"No doubt there is a plot somewhere to create disturbances," said Mme. Severin. "You must tell Nicholas."

"Zorah wants me to go and see her to-morrow. It is urgent, said Ali."

"I wonder John Culver himself has not been over to see us. These are times when we must all keep in touch with one another."

The carriage waited outside the garden door with its curtains drawn. The two women sat closely together, Veronica's arm still linked in her mother's during the drive, but both became silent.

Veronica followed in thought the man she loved. She reminded herself how he would have to cast off every care, every consideration, even every thought that might hamper complete duty to his country. That as a man girded for a race, with his life as the prize, he would have to be ready to act, to serve, to sacrifice, without respect of self or of any other person whatsoever.

She put the question to herself. If she, Veronica Severin, the daughter of as brave a patriot as ever breathed, were to fall short in courage, self-sacrifice, and strict self control, how could she in any way be worthy of the love of such a man as Pierre Marson?

For answer every fiber of nerve within her stiffened. She possessed all the caution as well as all the passion of her father's race, qualities inseparably intertwined in Armenian character through the very nature of its development under Turkish tyranny. It follows then that when her mother turned to her as the carriage drew up and said, "Be careful, dear! Prying eyes may

be about!" Veronica replied in a steady voice, "Have no fear!" and when she came under the lamplight and threw back her scarf there was no trace left on her face of recent agitation beyond an added depth to the color of her eyes.

"Zia! Still up? But that is naughty, very naughty," cried Mme. Severin, as stepping through the double doors of the portico into the lewan she saw Zia struggling to escape from Amina's arms.

"I can do nothing with her, O lady," wailed the woman. "Since the khowaja went off she has been like a little mejnoun."

"What khowaja?" asked 'Anna Severin, sharply, while Zia escaping, ran to Veronica and threw herself into her arms as if for protection.

"There, there, child! Be good and then Aunt Vronka will take you to bed herself," said Veronica in a soothing voice, though that instant her heart jumped at Amina's reply.

"Khowaja Rosen, the German consul!"

With a startled flash in her eyes Anna Severin looked at Veronica. What new communication was this, she seemed to ask?

"Yes, he came just after the master went out. I was taking Zia to her room. She heard the khowaja's voice and then nothing could hold her. Allah! You know what she is!" concluded Amina.

"Go now and get on with your work," said her mistress. "I will look after the child."

Amina made off with alacrity, glad to be easily relieved from blame, while Mme. Severin came to the divan where Veronica sat holding Zia in her arms.

Zia was talking in a shrill, excited voice.

"I can't understand, dear," said her grandmother. "Go back to the beginning and tell Mémé all about it."

"I hate him. He is a wicked man. He gave me a box of chocolates and when I said things he did not like he took them away from me and said he would give them to another little girl who was a real friend and not like me."

"That was very unkind," said Mme. Severin, decidedly. "What was he angry about?"

"He came to play the violin with some new music for Vronka. I told him Aunt Vronka was in the garden and that Papa and Mémé were there. He asked me why I had come home without them."

"Did you tell him we had a visitor?"

"Yes, I thought he might have forgotten our dear Monsieur Marson, so I put him in mind of the holiday in the mountains, and how we all loved him."

She was too absorbed in her recital to notice the horrified glance passing between her aunt and grandmother.

"Then he asked me a lot of questions and I got tired of answering them."

"What questions, dearie?" put in Veronica, quietly.

"He wanted to know when Monsieur Marson had come to the garden, and who brought him, and if we had expected him. I said it was a beautiful surprise that had made us all very happy. He looked cross and I asked him why, and said Monsieur Marson was always so gay, and I should like him better if he was the same."

"That was rude," said Mme. Severin, firmly.

"No! It was Herr Rosen who was rude. He said he had better taste than to imitate the manners of a grinning dog of a Frenchman. I told him that his own manners were very impolite to speak like that of our

visitor, and that it was not only me who loved Monsieur Marson, but that Mémé and Aunt Vronka did."

"And Papa, too?" thrust in Mme. Severin.

"Yes," said Zia with hesitation, "but I said I did not think he liked him as much as we did."

"Did Herr Rosen ask what we were talking about?"

Veronica put this question, trying to speak calmly, though her heart throbbed with the pain of a new and burning anxiety.

"Indeed, he did! But I told him that when I asked what any one had been talking about I was called inquisitive and scolded. Then he took away the chocolates. He was red as a bride's veil, quite quite red, and very angry. He came close up to me. I thought he was going to shake me. If he had I meant to pinch him hard."

"All the same he ought to have waited till I came in," said Mme. Severin, too concerned about the man's anger to denounce its effect on Zia.

"I told him to go away and I stamped my foot at him. I said it was my Papa's house and he did not allow any one to be unkind to me."

"You must never do that again," said her grandmother, sternly. "It is not for a little one like you to decide who comes to the house or not. Herr Rosen was our guest. It is a shameful thing to drive away a guest."

Zia started to wail. For Mémé to turn against her gave a tragic twist to conduct of which she had been not a little proud.

"She is very tired, mother. If you will let me I will put her to bed," said Veronica, feeling wondrously tender towards the unconscious little champion of Pierre.



Also she was secretly elated, whatever the risk, that Otto Rosen had been defied and certainly made to eat humble pie, though at a child's hands.

"Very well, and I will come in later and see that she is quite a good girl," said Mme. Severin.

Left alone she became very grave, anticipating a vindictive if petty revenge on Otto Rosen's part for the behavior of a child. How could it be averted? Was there a means by which she could disarm his jealousy and resentment?

An idea soon came to her. With clearing brow she hurried to her writing table. Shortly she had written and fastened up a letter, and then called Amina to her.

"Give this to Murad and tell him to go with all haste to the house of the German effendi," she said. "Come and tell me when he returns for then I shall know how quickly he has delivered my message. And Amina!" she called out as the woman hurried from the room. "Come back after you have sent Murad off. I want you to light the lamps in the salon."

Anna Severin, always alert in the face of a complicated emergency, again put on her considering cap. Then muttering, "Now to persuade and convince Veronica," she quitted the lewan.

## CHAPTER VIII

AS a rule the German Consulate showed no signs of life at this hour. But to-night the whole town was alive. Every café was full, inside and out, of talking and gesticulating groups. In the narrow streets men passed and repassed incessantly, a continuous hum of voices and hoarse shoutings echoed and re-echoed between the blank-faced walls of the houses.

“Clear the court!” shouted the Consul as he came in. “Let no one enter again without bringing me word.”

Men standing in groups under the arcade of the court, and squatting near the divan in the gateway began a hurried exodus while the doorkeeper reiterated the order in a shrill, penetrating voice.

The Consul turned sharply to the majestic Kawass who was following him in.

“Give it to me!” he said, savagely. “Have a care, you idiot, or you will drop the case. Hold yourself in readiness. I may go out again to the Serai at any minute.”

The Kawass, with an air of relinquishing some prized treasure of the universe, gave up the violin case, then made a magnificent gesture signifying absolute readiness to fly to the ends of the earth at His Excellency’s command. But his swarthy face scowled blackly as Herr Rosen marched across the paving and up the steps to the great door overhung by the Insignia of Germany.

“Why must a man of my race wait upon the will of

such as these?" he said in an irritable aside to the keeper of the gate.

"Allah is great! The world changes. It will be your turn one day."

"Please God!" returned the Kawass, hopefully. "May it soon be His will, for these Christians are all alike."

He produced cigarettes for two from the voluminous folds of his trousers, and sitting down by the gate began to discuss vigorously the pros and cons of the burning topic of the hour.

The Consulate was to be open all night in case of the arrival of important messages by wire or hand. At the sound of Rosen's step and voice two or three clerks left in charge, who had their heads together in busy confab, flew to their desks with an air of industry. To their surprise and relief he took no notice of them but passed on to his own sanctum and closed the door with a bang.

He seemed pent up with suppressed emotions, and, after placing his violin case aside, paced with fiery energy up and down the room, setting his teeth in anger.

The suspicions stirred up by the sight of Dr. Severin and Marson together at the station had come back in a virulent form. Instinct and revenge demanded prompt denouncement of Severin in a quarter that would mean prompt arrest, but his punishment would not touch the chief offender and foe, and might irretrievably estrange Veronica.

Yet with Veronica herself Otto Rosen was bitterly incensed. Zia had betrayed even more than she had confessed or imagined. Why this complaisance to a man who was the national enemy of Germany? Obligations of personal friendship to him, Otto Rosen, numbered

years, whereas the acquaintance of the Frenchman counted in weeks only.

What did it mean, he asked, suddenly kicking a stool that lay in his way with a force so savage that it flew across the room and knocked over a low table on which was a tray with glasses and a syphon.

With a jerk he pulled up short, glared with starting eyeballs at the havoc on the floor, while from his lips tumbled a fluent stream of Teutonic swear words. Startled clerks, hearing the crash, burst in at the door, fearing an untoward catastrophe.

"What do you want here?" he called angrily. "Can't I have an accident without the whole Consulate neglecting its duty? Here, I want this mess cleared up. Sharp! Send some one to see to it."

Suddenly he composed himself, and sitting down stared straight in front of him without moving a muscle. A native servant came silently in, sopped up the water and brushed the débris into a pan. He went out and brought in more glasses and a fresh syphon.

"Put that table in a safer place up against the wall," ordered Rosen. "The next time I find it in the middle of the room you can look for another master."

Volubly the man began with many salaams to defend and excuse himself.

"Enough! It is finished. Go!" roared Rosen, exasperated.

The edge of his inward anger had worn blunt, but he still sat brooding over the indignity put upon him by an impudent child, and the slight to his loyal friendship for the Severin household by their hospitality to a Frenchman.

For what else than a slight could he call this welcome



and pronounced partiality for an enemy of his country? He could call it more than a slight. It was a betrayal, for who could tell what treacherous machinations were not hidden beneath the seeming harmlessness of that unlucky visit?

How then to get a quid pro quo for indignity and slight, and a more than probable treachery? For the indignity, best of all he would like to place the sharp-tongued little Zia across his knees and whip her well.

"Do her good!" he exclaimed. "If ever I get a chance of correcting that child, bringing her under discipline to stamp out her willfulness, I shall take it."

And this resolve brought him close up to the other vital matter, his passion for Veronica, and any possible influence that the contemptible but dangerous visitor could have exercised upon her.

None, he told himself emphatically. The time had been too short. And then he remembered his own invitation to supper in the garden, proving that Monsieur Marson's visit had been quite unforeseen. What madness on Severin's part to invite such a man to the intimacy of that evening meal. He could picture it all, having shared it so often himself.

With this revival of memory he again grew angry with Veronica, who had treated him with cold indifference at his last appearance in their family circle. He began to think how he could annoy or even humiliate her. For apparently she had the excruciating taste to have a liking for this Frenchman. Zia had declared loudly, "We all like him," and had added, "especially Mémé and Aunt Vronka."

All kinds of rancor passed quickly through his mind.

Ceaselessly he began to rack his brain for a scapegoat on whom to vent his rage. Finally he got up with a concentrated air of wrath and determination, and walked out of the room. He had decided to denounce the Frenchman, who was the arch culprit.

He summoned his Kawass and started out for the Serai. In another ten minutes he entered the presence of the Wali of Opella with all the assurance of one whose visit is not only welcome but an act of condescension. A curious bearing for a representative of the German Kaiser at a moment when the whole of Europe and even of the world was still hanging upon the decision of Turkey to enter the arena of war.

But he, Otto Rosen, Germany's chief consular official for a wide district, was already in the secret. Even now he knew that Turkey's horrible gamble had begun, that Enver Pasha, Talaat Bey, and their accomplices of that deadly Committee of Union and Progress, so soon to be denounced as a "gang of unscrupulous ruffians," had thrown the dice on the side of the Central Powers. Hence this new access of German arrogance, and certainty of his own position.

Unluckily his hands were tied in many ways until the decision was openly made known. But even Rosen could not divine that, in the same hour in which he sought out the Wali, cable messages were flying, far and wide, revealing the treacherous blow struck by Turko-Germanic warships against Russia in the Black Sea.

Little time was ever wasted by Otto Rosen in disclosing the point of an official call. In fact he was apt to slur over essential niceties of etiquette, a practice which secretly affronted the Oriental mind, and often created an atmosphere of subtle hostility. At best he was a poor

diplomat and all the experience in the world would never alter him.

His present mood led him to abridge in a highly improper manner the customary shibboleth of ceremony. With indecent haste he tumbled out the subject of his visit.

Kahoum Pasha listened, smoking leisurely, gravely, his gray-green eyes shot with fleeting gleams of malice. His silence betrayed no surprise, nor did he appear interested. A spectator might have guessed him to be bored at the mere idea that any one particular Frenchman, more than another, slipping out of the country could possibly be a detail of the least importance at this special juncture.

"Prevention is better than cure," snapped Rosen. "He is a dangerous man. Who knows what plans of the country, and promises from traitors he is not carrying back with him? Hold him now and no valuable information can be conveyed to the enemy through him. I have the strongest grounds for distrusting him."

He paused, scenting of a sudden that his charge and demand were not receiving the attention he had expected. A wave of resentment surging within showed outwardly in the suspicious gl re of his eye turned upon the unperturbed Wali.

"It is well, Excellency! I compliment you upon your quick sight," said Kahoum Pasha, suavely. "Be assured that my own eyes are not shut. Though I have to sit here waiting the orders of the All-Highest from Stamboul my hands are able to stretch far on his behalf."

"Stop the rascal then! Have him arrested before he leaves the shore. Do not hesitate. Time is short. There must be no mistake," said Rosen, sharply.

From Kahoum Pasha's eyes darted an ironical glance that scanned the speaker keenly.

"What would you say if I told you that I already know every detail about the Frenchman, even to the fact that he halted on his way to sup with a family you reckon among your intimate friends?" The Wali paused to take a long whiff through his pipe.

Rosen stared with an air of amazed inquiry.

"It is true, Excellency!" the Wali went on, quietly. "And yet I shall allow this dangerous foreigner to sail to-morrow night for his own country."

Rosen, though cunning, was a mere tyro at the game of intrigue compared with the player before him. He was at no pains to hide his perplexity and anger. But before he could open his lips to speak again Kahoum Pasha called out in a loud voice. The curtain over the door moved and a young official known to Rosen as the Wali's confidential secretary came in.

"Repeat to his Excellency, Rosen Effendi, the report brought in about the Frenchman, the protected of Raschid Pasha whose life may God preserve!" said Kahoum Pasha.

"The protected of Raschid Pasha!" echoed Rosen with an accent of scornful incredulity; but already the secretary, having made his courteous salaams, began to speak. Rosen listened with mixed feelings of which impatience was emphatically the strongest.

"You believe that plausible tale, Highness?" he said, addressing the Wali.

"You have said it, Effendina," was the reply.

"He will never come back at all. You will lose him altogether. You must see it is only a blind."

"Not so! When the hour comes he will be here.



What he will then bring into the country will be more valuable than anything he now carries away. One whose word carries higher weight than my own has so declared. The Frenchman leaves the country unchecked."

"That is your last word?" asked Rosen, acidly. "The German military staff at Damascus and above all in Stamboul will look with different eyes on his escape. For an escape, unchecked, it will be, and nothing else."

"That is my last word, Excellency," said the Wali, dryly.

Rosen swallowed the coffee he still held in his hand, dropped into the cup a half finished cigarette, and rose to his feet. With unusual punctilio he took leave and went back to the Consulate in a ferment of discontent and baffled designs.

As he mounted the steps from the courtyard a figure shot up from a mat near the door, salaamed humbly, and presented a letter.

Herr Rosen took it, looked at the handwriting, then at the man and walked on.

"Khowaja! Am I to wait?" said the man, following him.

"What for?"

The man spread out deprecating palms as he answered. "The reply, khowaja!"

"There is none! Go!" said Rosen, loudly, and passed into the building.

He flung the letter on a console table by the door and sat down at his writing table. Fresh papers at once claimed his close attention. He bent over them, frowning, examining one after the other, then pushed a bell at his side.

An hour after midnight he got up with a big yawn. His subordinates could now carry through the remainder of the work. It was by no means necessary for him to share their vigil, though he had given orders he was to be called at once if any important message arrived.

When he rose to his feet to go to bed he caught sight of the letter and remembered he had not read it. He took it to his bedroom. Again he flung it down vindictively with a revival of the anger driven forcibly to cover by the urgent business of the last few hours.

But the virulence of his previous mood had subsided. As he undressed his glance wandered speculatively to the closed envelope. At last he took it up, hesitated, and finally tore it open with an air of decision.

"We have just come in from the garden," he read, "and find to our real chagrin we have missed your visit. Why did you leave before we came? You can only have left the house a few minutes before our arrival and nothing would have pleased and refreshed us (especially my music-loving Veronica) more than an evening with your violin. If you can possibly arrange to return I beg of you to come. We shall expect you and be ready in the salon. We were delayed later than usual in the garden through an unexpected visitor whom Nicholas curiously enough ran across at the station. It was none other than the Frenchman who was a fellow guest for a few days in the hills this summer. No doubt you remember him. His time was extremely limited as he was on his way to the port. We supped as soon as the two men appeared, and at the end of the meal he had to say good-bye and resume his journey. Perhaps under the circumstances you are not sorry that business kept you from accepting my invitation to the garden. In any case

both Veronica and I trust you will make a special effort to return with your violin and give us the pleasure we always appreciate."

Otto Rosen read the letter with varying expressions of countenance. Suspicion still rankled at the back of his mind, and out of its depths some of the earlier bitterness swam to view. Yet he was not insensible to the conciliatory strain of the letter.

What did it mean? Almost as if the writer had already conveyed to Veronica the substance of his confidence of the afternoon.

Was it possible that Veronica had bent a willing ear to listen? And were these open expressions of regret, and the wish to retrieve a missed pleasure the first timid display of changing heart?

Question and surmise drew his eyes to a second slower reading of the letter. He pondered over every sentence, weighing the possible motives of every remark in turn. And while pondering he considered a reply, one that would be dignified and magnanimous, and yet convey a delicate suggestion of reproach and surprise that his friends had shown ready hospitality to an enemy of Germany. For a man of French blood must of necessity be in the opposing camp.

His brain was too tired to write out this reply now. Besides it was useless to send a letter in the middle of the night. He would answer in the morning. His last mental effort as he threw himself on the bed spluttered out in black hatred for this particular Frenchman above all others, and in contempt for the Wali's reprehensible slackness in letting him go.

## CHAPTER IX

WITH a sense of ineffable depression Veronica fell in with her mother's scheme for propitiating Herr Rosen after his fatal skirmish with Zia. Murad's delay was not regarded as ominous until he gave a highly colored account of his reception and dismissal by the Consul.

The two women looked silently at each other, dismay in their eyes.

"He won't come to-night," said Veronica, speaking first, with a wan smile. "What a relief! I doubt if I could have hidden my real feelings from him."

"Don't say that, when it is a matter of sheer necessity," said Anna Severin, excitedly. "You are short-sighted not to look beyond personal feeling. You have not grasped the situation. Germany at war with France, her ancient enemy! We, Otto Rosen's friends, have entertained a Frenchman. The fact was disclosed to him in the least desirable way."

"But so far we are neutrals and should therefore be impartial," retorted Veronica, warmly.

"He knows that Turkey is about to enter the war on Germany's side."

"He may know and say what he likes, but he shall not frighten me into submission to his whims and tyrannies. My one and sole fear is that the breach may come before Pierre is able to get away."

While waiting for the expected entrance of Rosen,



Veronica, turning over the leaves of the music on the open piano, had become almost calm and resigned. Now, with her mother's reproach, sensations of extreme uneasiness and cold dread sprang to life in her mind.

"For that very reason I am trying to keep in with the man," said Mme. Severin, emphatically. "He will make a dangerous enemy, bitter to vindictiveness! His influence with Turkish authorities will now carry far."

"But they all dislike him," said Veronica.

"That does not matter in the least. It is the power behind him that makes him of consequence, and quite independent of their individual favor. But here comes Nicholas! He will tell us what to do."

"Hullo, what is the meaning of these gala lamps and general fine array?" exclaimed Dr. Severin, glancing around surprised as he entered through a window of the veranda. "I expected to find both of you gone to bed, exhausted after the excitement of the day."

"It is just this, Nicholas! Zia has been indiscreet," and Mme. Severin explained the situation.

The blood mounted to his face and he drew a long breath. "If he stops Marson through spite or jealousy, and he is quite capable of this, it will look as if we had betrayed our friend," was his first rejoinder.

"Exactly!" said Mme. Severin, decisively.

"But he will not dare," said Veronica, hotly. "He has no authority to act till Turkey is the actual ally of Germany."

"I have this moment come direct from the Club," said Nicholas, looking at her with troubled eyes. "The die is cast. Private messages have come through, that Russian ports in the Black Sea have been bombarded by the Turkish fleet. Hostilities have been willfully pro-

voked. The two German warships were, of course, in with them."

"And hostilities against Russia commits Turkey to a war with France and Great Britain," said Mme. Severin in a tone of finality. "The unspeakable has happened."

"Moreover," he went on, "troops are concentrating. Mobilization has started, of Christians as well as Mussulmans."

"Our people! How will it affect them?" said Anna, in a breathless voice. The disclosure of this latest news dwarfed in significance all else that was in her mind.

Nicholas took out a cigarette and lit it. His face was void of expression.

"God knows!" he burst out suddenly. "According to all reports and telegrams the Central Powers have already beaten the Entente."

Veronica, always sensitive to mental atmosphere, and stupified by this last climax to her fears, was unable to utter a word. Only her big eyes black with emotion fixed unwaveringly upon her brother's face.

"Were there any newspapers in the Club to-day?" asked Mme. Severin.

"A few, all German, full of their own victories. Also bulletins from Constantinople, confirming the rumors that England and her Allies have been thoroughly beaten to their knees, by land and sea."

"I don't believe it! Do you?" exclaimed Mme. Severin.

"The news is given in such detail that there must be some truth in the reports of the actual state of affairs."

"What is the feeling in the town?"

"The same impression that the Germans are in truth top dog. A merchant just arrived from Constantinople

declares that there they are supreme, though stern methods alone enable them to hold their supremacy. Court martial is no idle threat. It seems that the Turks are crazy about reconquering Egypt. They declare they will drive the British out of the Persian Gulf and destroy their commerce with Bagdad and Ispahan. They speak of invading even India, where the natives will welcome them with open arms. A party of German officers are expected here any day to organize military affairs."

"I hope to heaven we are not going to have a repetition of that terrible time when troops for the Balkan war were being concentrated," exclaimed Mme. Severin, raising her hand with a tragic gesture. "How many of those unfortunate men deserted?"

"About eight or nine thousand at least," said Nicholas, darkly, as his mind at once conjured up the lawless state of the environs of Opella in consequence, the multiplication of highway robberies and villainous plundering in the whole district, which followed the wholesale desertion of badly treated Turkish soldiers of many races. "Discipline under German officers will be more effectual these days."

"Also more brutal," said Mme. Severin, emphatically, "to Turkey's infinite satisfaction. For Turkey irritated and at war is nothing but a fanatical barbarian. The gang who misrule her and have deliberately led her into war with her ancient friends will march on from one shocking blunder to another, and from crime to crime."

Nicholas checked her abruptly with a warning uplift of one finger and went to the window, opening it wide to peer right and left under the arcades of the veranda. The night was very still and dark. The trees in the

garden were silhouetted black against the star-sown sky. Not a movement within the inclosure indicated that a living soul was near. Only from the town beyond the high walls there sounded detached raucous cries and calls, a monotonous beating of drums, the barking of dogs and other signs of life peculiar to the Orient.

He came back, fastened the window carefully and let down the heavy damask curtains. To the room door he next stepped lightly, opened it suddenly and looked into the lewan where a hanging lamp still burned.

"It is all right, Nicholas," called out Veronica. "No one is about. The servants are in their own quarters. The house doors are bolted."

He shut the door and sat down on the divan by his mother, who once more seemed overcome by a wave of black forebodings.

"Dear soul! Brave heart!" he ejaculated in a moved voice, covering her clasped fingers with his hand. "What you say is absolutely true and my personal opinions are one with yours. But silence must be more than ever our watchword in this critical hour for Armenia."

"Armenia? Is it as bad as that?" exclaimed Veronica, forgetting for the moment all that had been said in the garden but what immediately concerned her love.

"Certainly! Robbed of her protectors, the only shields between her and a pitiless animosity, she will be in a helpless and highly perilous position. It is useless to conceal it from you."

"There will still be America to protect us; America who has done so much," said the girl in a protesting voice.

"Do you know that to-night in the Club allusion was



made purposely in my hearing to the share that Armenians took in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870? It was even recalled that the volunteers who fought in the French ranks were Armenians from Zeitoun."

"The men of Zeitoun have always been fighters," said Mme. Severin, who was as familiar with the adventurous annals of her husband's people as with those of her parents' race. "My God! Will there never be an end to this uncertainty of life? Must we to the end of our days cringe and conceal and be on our guard? My son, we should have followed Monsieur Marson's advice and shaken off the dust of this accursed land, to seek and find freedom before we die."

A blighting breath of the past swept over her face, making it suddenly old, and impressing her with increased fragility. Nicholas, looking at her, was chilled with presentiment. To lose his mother would as vitally affect his moral being as would the loss of a limb his body. Never had his mother spoken so strongly. It proved how deeply she was shaken, almost to breaking point.

Suddenly he turned away his face, putting his hand across his eyes. The wind of freedom! The mere thought of it thrilled him with ecstasy. God knew how his whole being panted to be breathing the clean-swept spaces of its kingdom. Had he up to now been chasing a chimera? Was it even right for him to hold fast to the patriotic creed of his father?

"My son, forgive your old mother," said Anna Severin, speaking again with self mastery as she turned with a quick gesture to throw her arm round his neck. "Until to-day I had been living in a fool's paradise. I dreamt that the days of spies were gone forever, that

the gains of eavesdroppers were so meager and rare that they had renounced the game. The awakening to reality has thrown me off my balance. Wait until I get again into touch with those old days of unrest, and dread, and a never sleeping caution. With the need of the hour my strength will grow. For my children and through my children I can still face all that is to come."

Veronica was weeping silently, crouched on the ground at her mother's knee. Personal fear and sorrow were in retreat. The past heroisms and fortitude of her mother had leaped to the front of her mind. Whatever happened they must all cling together and God in his justice and mercy would not omit to help them. It was curious how in all their minds an uncanny foreboding of the future hung over them like a cloud.

Nicholas lifted his head and slipped his arm round his mother.

"Again I have spoken hastily," he said. "We are too prone to concentrate on probable disaster in a crisis of danger. In reality there are others in more immediate danger than our own people. For Armenians are being mobilized to fight with Turkey, who knows how well they acquitted themselves in the Balkan war."

"Who then are in most danger?" asked Anna Severin, adding, bitterly, "in any case don't count upon Turkish benevolence for our people, if that is what you mean."

"Englishmen, Frenchmen and, of course, Russians. The men will all be imprisoned, that is to say all those who failed to take warning and get away in time."

Veronica's tears were checked by these startling words. Her eyes fastened upon his face with questioning anxiety.

"Will they stop Monsieur Marson from embarking?" she asked breathlessly.

"Unless Rosen acts promptly he will get through safely enough. Even then Turkish dilatoriness will no doubt delay any order from being carried out in time. He has every chance of getting away," said Nicholas in a troubled voice, "but you must certainly make up your mind to be more amiable to Otto Rosen, my girl! More may depend upon your attitude than you can possibly imagine."

"Wait until to-morrow," interjected Mme. Severin, pressing Veronica against her knee. "He will read the letter I wrote to him and be here in the evening as usual. Of that I am certain. Veronica, by the by, is going to visit Zorah. She can warn John at the same time. He must be on his guard."

"It will be her last visit there for a long time. The roads will not be safe for her. She must take Murad with her and come home without fail before sunset."

Though Veronica went late to bed she was up early in the morning. She had dropped into a dreamless sleep almost the instant her head had touched the pillow. Many emotions and surprises rending her fiercely throughout the day had resulted in a great physical weariness which brought her the mercy of oblivion.

The way to El-Fereidus lay north of the town. The bright morning sun, the breeze still soft and aromatic with the odors of the night, the glittering foliage of the orchards filling the valley, the mists light as sea foam on the hills of the north, all these things quickened and braced her spirit.

In front of her Murad rode on a sturdy gray mule hung with a well-filled saddle-bag. He sang incessantly in a monotonous sing-song chant.

Veronica looked steadily ahead, reflective and sad, yet

with hope faintly astir at her heart. Her figure swayed lightly on her Western saddle in obedience to the motion of her strong limbed pony, which trotted untiringly along the road.

After a ride of some three miles they crossed a bridge over a stream and at once turned aside to follow its course along a valley lying between two hills.

With the windings of this wadi the stream zig-zagged from side to side, its banks fringed with willows and oleanders which were still a mass of pink flowers. Of traffic there was quite an amount, for the road led to the village of El-Fereidus and the silk factory belonging to John Culver. They overtook many women trudging along on foot. Peasants were driving strings of laden asses in each direction.

Soon the low ridges on either side grew tall and began to draw nearer together. At a bend of the track they rose into veritable cliffs. The gap between looked in the distance like a giant gateway through which the stream flowed into the same river that watered the orchards of Opella. From the workshops on the water bank came the creaking of busy silk wheels. The air was alive with the whir and swish of many shuttles at work. There was nothing stagnant in this special factory whatever the fate of other heavily taxed industries.

Veronica checked her pony to walking pace and leaned sideways in passing to look through the unglazed windows. A man standing within caught sight of her and came at once into the road.

"Hullo, Veronica, what is Nicholas about to let you stray so far from home to-day?" he asked, caressing the pony, which turned its head to nozzle him familiarly.

"It was my last chance for a long time, he told me



last night, and as Zorah sent me a message yesterday I didn't want to disappoint her. All well here I hope," she said, indicating by a glance the noisy interior beyond.

"Could not be better," he said, heartily, then his brow clouded. "For how long Allah alone knows!"

"I have a special message for you from Nicholas," she said, gravely.

"What is it?"

"Not here! One never knows," she replied with a significant glance at a muleteer with a string of mules, and then at some idle Arabs lounging about the entrance in their usual happy aimlessness.

John Culver gave her a straight look of inquiry from eyes that were deep set and curiously luminous. He was a tallish man, broad-shouldered, yet lean. Though his movements were deliberate, almost lazy, they gave an impression of strength in reserve. He continued to scan her face as if discerning a something new and unfamiliar in its expression.

"I will come up to the house after Zorah has had time to empty her heart and show off the boy's new tricks," he said, a humorous twinkle in his eyes suddenly brightening his somewhat grave face delightfully. "I hope Zia is well?"

"She was sleeping soundly when I left. She keeps better on the whole these days," said Veronica moving away, a bright color called into her cheeks under that penetrating look.

The house seen from below was a mass of gray stone looking part of the rocky cliff against which it was built. The pony climbed nimbly up a steep winding path to a postern gate in the wall of rock. Here Veronica dismounted. As Murad led the two beasts away to the

stable the gate opened and Sheikh Ali, slim and long in his Bedouin garb, came out.

"Neharak said, ya Sitt, Veronica!" he said, salaaming gravely.

"May your day also be blessed, Sheikh Ali," she replied, smiling kindly.

"You honor the house with your presence," he said, ceremoniously, and held the gate open for her to enter.

For a few seconds the young man glanced alternately within and without the gateway as if attracted by two magnets of equal interest. Finally he deliberately closed the door, gave a decisive pull to his abbai over one shoulder and stalked after Murad calling to him to wait.

Veronica crossed a little paved court and mounted a flight of stone steps which emerged under a colonnade of arches. Passing through the nearest into a vaulted passage she paused to call a greeting into a doorless interior whence came to tickle the nostrils of passers-by spicy odors suggestive of Oriental cooking.

The old woman hovering over a pan of charcoal turned a black face with ivory gleaming teeth to beam welcome upon the visitor.

"Eywallah! It is none other than Sitt Veronica herself," she cried. "The mother with her son wait for you on the terrace."

## CHAPTER X

**J**OHAN CULVER was one of those emancipated beings to whom the dallying ways of social conventions mean servitude of an accursed and detested type. His father had run the silk factory before him. He had been nurtured in the sound of its looms, bound to the Orient by a life-long meshwork of familiarity.

School years spent in England had not quenched the spirit which carried him eastward on his few long holidays with all the eagerness of a homing bird. From adolescence to manhood his insuperable impulse to breathe the open air of nature had grown ever fuller and stronger. Camping out under the stars was a ceaseless delight. He found life of any kind ideal, that had the flavor of the desert in its breath.

These wild and happy tastes, held within certain restrictions during his parents' lifetime, burst their cage when a year after their death his only sister, Esther, married Nicholas Severin and he was left alone. To relate how he fell in love with and won his Arab wife in spite of obstacles galore is a separate chapter of his life.

It had all happened one transcendent spring, when an irresistible nostalgia for the freedom of open spaces had driven him to pitch his canvas tent between green slopes and stretches of golden sand, among the tents of a friendly group of the Beni-Weldeh. The sons of the Weldeh loved him as a brother up to the hour in which

he made overtures of marriage in the customary way for Zorah, the daughter of their Sheikh Mabruk.

John Culver had chanced upon a timely moment in which to broach his proposal. Owing to a serious dispute with the tax-collecting powers of Turkish authority the Sheikh and his family were in grave monetary straits. Sheikh Mabruk had been arrested and put into prison. The herds and flocks had been confiscated, all except a residue, hastily collected and driven to a secret hiding place.

The price offered by the Englishman for his Arab bride meant not only release for his prospective father-in-law, but also the redemption of the flocks, with a tempting little sum over and above to hoard against future trouble. Marriage with a Roumi was against the law of Islam, but then the Bedouin are not strict in religious observances. In addition, who but Allah, himself, could have opened the hand of the rich man to offer the price that would succor their tents?

In spite of the fierce criticism and opposition launched by conservative spirits of both sexes against a hated breach in the social codes of their tribe, the pretensions of rival claimants were put aside. John Culver's perfect knowledge of the language, his high standing among the Bedouin, and his lavish distribution of presents removed obstacles that were by no means of a trifling nature.

He carried his will through, to the goal of signing the marriage contract with the girl whose exotic beauty and a something, palpably magnetic, in the small oval face and dark eyes, had fired him body and soul, and mounted like strong wine to his brain.

For Zorah was no mere beautiful, barbarous child of



the desert. She stood to John Culver for the living symbol of an ideal he had cherished all his life. She was the embodiment of that Orient he loved, and to which but for the accident of birth he belonged as truly as the native born.

On the whole he lived on good terms with his wife's relations. Upon Zorah had fallen the brunt of the displeasure stirred up by the marriage. Yet John Culver's pockets were too well lined to make his enmity profitable to the Beni-Weldeh. The arrival of the baby son smoothed over the breach to a great extent.

Ali, the eldest son of Sheikh Mabruk, spent most of his time in the Culver household, or in the factory, whichever his fancy favored for the moment. For the cult of the normal Bedouin is how best to dispose of his time agreeably, with neither the wish nor the obligation to work imposed upon him. Between him and his sister was a bond of strong affection. He worshiped his small nephew. John Culver more than tolerated his Bedouin brother-in-law. He even liked him.

During the Balkan war, life at El Fereidus had remained practically untouched, save for the thinning out of the factory hands by recruiting agents of the Sultan. Women had stepped in to work the vacant looms. But the present crisis held strange omens.

How long would John Culver be left in freedom to carry on his business? What would be its fate once Turkey stepped definitely to the side of Germany and her Allies? For he was still a British subject, though an alien to his country's customs.

These were only a few of the vexed questions cudgeling his brains as he entered the house and climbed in

his deliberate way to the roof terrace which Zorah made her chief abiding place.

His face relaxed as he mounted the steps. Little dancing lights broke up the gravity of his eyes. He lifted his head as if to inhale the scents which drifted lazily to meet him. Subtly penetrating scents, both bitter and sweet, scents in which oleander, geranium, myrtle, thyme, and other alluring odors alternately prevailed.

The terrace roof was broad and long, one half running at right angles to the other. He came out on the end overlooking the gorge, and gave a glance, as he passed, into the upper chamber. The persiennes were drawn and in the shaded interior a long mirror glinted, and white mosquito nets hovered, like pale ghosts, over the deep Tyrian blue of the silken bed covers.

Tubs of oleanders in rosy bloom bordered the outer wall of the terrace. Across the deep angle from parapet to the roof room there stretched a barrier of trelliswork overrun with bougainvillea, a mass of purple stars of many shades and of flaming ruby. Over the low arch in the center, and almost hiding it, trailed long tresses of foliage splashed with the same wine-tinted petals.

With a touch that protected the flowers John Culver parted the living curtain and stood for a moment looking at the home of his dreams. It was a home into which had entered more than a little of the charm that had lulled the Lotus-eater in that "land where it was always afternoon."

The ground was thickly strewn with sand that glistened white in the sunlight. Couched on the sand was a Bedouin tent, one of the most approved kind, having in addition to the dark brown roof and overhanging drapery

of goatshair canvas, walls of woven reed matting after the style of the desert.

Several young palm trees, appearing to grow out of a projecting ledge of rocky soil, spread their fans against the cliff behind. A feathery tamarisk rose above the parapet in the far corner. Climbing geraniums wandered in profusion round an embrasure in the end wall which opened upon a vista of the river, winding north towards the broken waves of faraway lavender hills.

Passers-by on the water below the grim house, built like a fortress into the rock, were apt to look up at the high outer wall, honeycombed with the usual loopholes, and say "The Englishman knows how to guard his harem securely as any Pasha."

The Englishman himself walked over to the tent where the reed walls facing the view of the river were widely opened. The entrance was enlarged and sheltered from the sun by an awning of thickly interlaced green boughs, which Ali had taken unaccustomed pains that same morning to freshen and re-arrange in honor of the expected guest. Just outside was a myrtle bush in flower, growing in a giant vase of hammered brass.

A low divan was spread out under the leafy sun screen. Veronica, leaning dreamily against a pile of cushions, looked up as John Culver's tall figure suddenly appeared.

"You are alone? How is that?" he said, quickly, glancing at the child's toys which littered the sand.

"Only for a moment. Here comes Zorah, herself!"

As she spoke the division curtain within the tent was lifted by a little hand with henna-stained finger tips. A slender figure, supple and graceful, stepped lightly to

view, wearing a wrapper of soft muslin spotted with red, and girdled with a silken cord. A tiny red cap was set saucily on the dark hair, which was waved and abundant, and drawn into two long plaits interwoven with gold and red threads.

By what magic had John Culver induced his wife to banish even temporarily the massive silver ornaments and coins which are the dowry of every Bedouin woman? Only the bracelets encircling her wrists and arms were still retained in their place. Perhaps the rare jeweled chain she wore round her neck, the ruby studded disk in her hair, and two smaller ones to match hanging from her ears were part of the magic.

How well they set off the mellow tan of the brilliant little face to which the velvety texture and color of perfect health gave an added luster. She had a small straight nose, and finely curved lips. The upper one was short, the lower pouted. Little blue stars tattooed sparsely round the mouth and a trio of them between the eyebrows lent a far more startling piquancy to her face than that given by any variety of Georgian patch.

But in looking at Zorah all these features were forgotten by the beauty of her eyes. They were so big and dark and unfathomable, and their look so penetrating and yet caressing, with the white of their setting heightened to a pearly brilliancy by a light shadow of kohl round the socket. John Culver found in these eyes all the best that the East possessed, shadow and light, fire and proud aloofness, and above all dreams, the shuddering, vague yet tranquil dreams of the Orient.

"He sleeps," she said, taking his hand and drawing him behind the curtain.

He had to lower his head to pass into the tent and gaze



at the picture of his son asleep on the rug spread out for his morning nap. It was a picture that was always new.

Zorah looked down upon the sturdy little limbs with an ecstasy of love and worship in her face. Suddenly a cloud flitted across its sunshine. She turned with a hurried gesture, nestling up against her husband as she held out her hand palm downward. He bent his head to press his lips to her thick, sweet-smelling hair.

As she lifted her hand it seemed of a sudden as if the eternal charm of the East was shed anew in the subdued light of the tent. A rare ring was on her finger, inset with a huge turquoise, a blue wonder of a stone which seemed to reflect its own brightness, and then after further concentration again to send it forth. Zorah prized this ring as her very life. It was her mascot, protecting her against the evil eye and many other dreaded dangers. The stone was a turquoise without blemish, possessing magic qualities. As long as she wore it she would be happy, but if ever she had the misfortune to lose it why then her happiness would take unto itself wings and forsake her.

"May Allah protect him!" she said. "For look, the stone has become green. I am afraid."

John put his arm round her and raised the little hand to look closely at the ring.

"Be at ease, Zorah, my star!" he said. "Remember the words of the soothsayer when we purchased the ring. If danger threatens, the stone will become green because it will be drawing the danger upon itself. If it seems green now, it is drawing the bad influence away from you and the boy."

It was so simple a matter to explain the omen satis-

factorily from the Oriental point of view that John Culver had no scruples in driving out the fancy of danger by an appeal to his wife's credulity.

"You have certainly eased my soul, but still I am afraid," she said slowly with an anxious look at the child and then at the ring, "but our guest is alone. She is in trouble. We must go back to her."

This last revelation, Veronica in trouble, explained Zorah's mood. What did it mean, pondered John Culver as he seated himself cross-legged on the ground, his back against the divan, while Zorah dexterously pulled forward and piled behind him the hard bolsters which, to her continual wonder, he always preferred to the pillows. As he handed round cigarettes to which Zorah held a lighted match in turn, as befitted her rôle as hostess, he noticed that Veronica's eyes glittered, and their lids were slightly red as if she had recently wept.

"What is the message?" he asked suddenly.

"How much do you know?" asked Veronica. "I don't want to give you stale news."

"He knows what I have unfolded to you, my sister," put in Zorah. "Speak on! Only the leaves are listening to us here."

To John Culver, who was just another big brother like Nicholas to Veronica, her narrative was unreserved except as regarded the closer tie now existing between herself and Pierre. John, however, did not fail to notice the hesitating tremor of her voice when it was necessary to bring in the Frenchman's name. Very different was her accent of disdain and animosity when referring to Otto Rosen.

"Never liked the man," thrust in John Culver, pushing out his under lip. They talked in Arabic on Zorah's

account. "Now he will be a declared open enemy, for his behavior to Zia is unpardonable."

"The enemies of my husband are also mine," added Zorah, with a little click of her tongue, and a sudden flashing yet intense look in her eyes.

He surveyed her with a slow, whimsical smile. The thought of personal danger was still alien to him. It seemed an impossible notion after the long years in which he and his family before him had lived on good terms with natives and foreigners alike, above all with the Turks. And at the back of his mind, in spite of uneasy speculation, lay the hopeful probability of being allowed to remain unmolested and forgotten in his quiet backwater, however the waters of strife might rage and swirl in the open.

"If the Bedouin pitch their tents in the camp of the Turks who have made friends with the Germans, what then?" he said, teasing her. "For the English are at war with the Germans, you know."

"Allah has not given a man two hearts," she made quick reply, "and as your heart is with me and your son it cannot be English. It is Bedouin."

"You see, Veronica, how Zorah has settled the matter," he said, raising his eyebrows.

"Zorah wishes to test your courage. A daughter of Sheikh Mabruk knows well that a man must always be ready to fight the enemies of his race," said Veronica, thinking of Pierre especially, and speaking out of the fullness of her home training.

"It is not yet certain who are his enemies," returned Zorah, darting beneath her long black lashes an appealing, apprehensive look over to John. "No man lives who is braver than my husband, but our star would be an

evil one if destiny ordained that he must fight in the English camp."

"Shall I be allowed the choice?" said John, stolidly. "When the war cloud bursts—it is right overhead at this moment—those who raised the storm will command, and not offer a choice."

"Though women are words and men are deeds, yet Zorah has spoken wisely," said a soft yet guttural voice, as Ali's slim figure stepped noiselessly to view and squatted cross-legged on the rug before them. "You are, indeed, our brother, the true son of our tents. God give you long life!"

John Culver looked up, frowning.

"How long have you been there, Ali!" he said, quietly.

"No longer than to listen to my sister's words, and wait the right moment to draw near," said the young man, suavely.

Veronica was secretly provoked at Ali's appearance. For she was on the point of stating that Nicholas stood exactly in the same predicament as John, liable to be called upon at any moment to take arms against their friends.

"What is England to you now, my friend and brother?" Ali went on. "What happiness does that land of no sun and false friends ever give to you?"

"False friends? You invent a strange fable there," interrupted John, smiling grimly.

"By my eyes, there is little else talked of in the bazaars to-day but the falseness of English promises, and the sapping of their strength."

"By whom?"

"Those powerful war lords, the Germans," said Ali,



uneasily. "I do not love the Germans, but they are strong, and their purse overflows. It is said that they hold the fate of this land in the hollow of their hands."

"Don't believe it, Ali," said Veronica, emphatically. "There are Russia and France to reckon with as well as England."

"God forbid that I should repeat a lie," disclaimed Ali, with visible excitement. "The cry of the Jihad is sounding in all the camps. There are tribes who have already sworn on the holy book that each one of them is the brother of all other Moslems, that united for the cause of Allah they will fight together as one gun, and if they die fall together under the same sword. And this they have sworn on the mouth and the heart."

"Speak on, Ali," said Zorah, imperatively. "Empty your heart of all you have seen and heard."

"Yesterday after sundown when I rode out to our camp, a holy man of the Shekhi Bekhr came and stood in the door of my father's tent. All our men gathered round to listen. 'Allah, the All-Powerful, wills that your sword drinks blood,' cried the holy man, 'for the time long foretold is now at hand. All infidels are to bite the dust, and the dust of their bones will be used to whiten the mosques.' He said that first of all it was necessary for all true believers, and above all the young men, to learn the fighting ways of the enemy. For their art of war is more powerful, and subtle, and hard to do battle with than any kind of combat hitherto known."

John Culver nodded his head, wisely.

"It is clear that Enver Pasha wants more soldiers for the Turkish army," he broke in. "That is what the dervish came to procure. If to gain his purpose he incites honest Bedouin to kill, like the Kurds, for their

pastime, he goes against the writing of the Khoran."

With glowing pride Zorah's eyes enveloped her husband. What a man thus to be able to read the secret motives of other men!

What she did not know was that he spoke deliberate intent to influence Ali, and through him his family and camp to consider another standpoint. For none knew better than John Culver that from no fanatical impulse, but only if it suited their purpose, would the Bedouin rise to the cry of the Jihad. Self interest alone would spur them to take every advantage of a priceless opportunity, once pillage and killing became authorized, provided the victims were not of the Moslem faith.

"What was Sheikh Mabrûk's reply to the dervish?" asked John, while Ali, nimbly rolling a fresh cigarette, seemed to be revolving the fresh idea put into his head. Zorah gazed solemnly at her ring.

"All-seeing and all-knowing as is my brother, he knows that my father is a man not easily to be persuaded. What can Sheikh Mabrûk gain by taking an oath? Is he not already the sheikh above all other sheikhs of this country? Can he not already help himself to all that he wants whether it be a sheep, a tent, or a camel?" said Ali, evasively, his black eyes glancing furtively yet with a fiery alertness of gaze from one to the other of his listeners.

"Take him this word from me," said John Culver, emphatically. "Let him beware of making a compact with the holy man. If he does, you will be taken with all the young men of your tents to add fighting power to the Turkish army. Directly the news is spread abroad that only the old men are left to guard the tents, brigands will attack and destroy everything. They will carry off

the flocks and herds, the women and children, and burn the harvest. When the sons of the Weldeh come back from fighting the battles of the Germans and the Turks—it is certain that all will not return, for some will be killed and others maimed—what then will they find in the place that was once their own? Death and desolation!”

Zorah gave a low wailing cry and began to rock her body to and fro. Veronica shivered and grew suddenly pale.

“Allah forbid these things!” exclaimed Ali, getting up with a swift, lithe movement. “I will go and tell all you say to my father, and open the eyes of my brothers. There is a way out of the snare. Inshallah! We must take it.”

“The gate of the desert is never shut,” said Zorah, lifting her head with eager understanding.

“Where is the boy? Let me see him before I go,” said Ali, abruptly.

Zorah rose, and together they slipped behind the curtain of division.

“John! Why did you paint such a terrible scene? Do you truly anticipate the worst?” said Veronica in a low voice.

“Anything may happen,” he said, guardedly, “and to make an impression on Sheikh Mabrûk after the dervish’s fiery oration, strong colors are necessary. His friends are mine and I want them to realize the truth. Once before Ali only just escaped conscription. You know what that means in the Turkish army for such a nature as his. He would be shot for insubordination, or go utterly under. It was I, myself, who found and paid the substitute. In this war there will be no way out

once the noose of service is round his neck. The Turks will press every able-bodied man they can find into uniform."

"What about yourself, John?" she asked, anxiously.

He shrugged his shoulders. The lines suddenly deepened between his brows.

"Allah knows!" he ejaculated.

"In case Zorah should become even more alarmed let me give you the special message from Nicholas now. You must be well on your guard, he says, for directly Turkey declares war it is quite certain that all the Frenchmen and Englishmen in Syria will be imprisoned."

"Nicholas may be right. For myself I cannot yet see clearly what will happen. One thing is certain that it is the Germans who are setting the Jihad in motion. It is a dangerous game to risk placing the heel of the Moslem on their own neck."

"What do you mean?"

"They, too, are Christians," said John, significantly. "The preaching of the Jihad must in the end recoil on themselves. They never show more than the crudest comprehension of the mind of the Orient."

Zorah and Ali reappeared.

"Hanna! This is the moment of decision of which I have already spoken," said Zorah, going up to John. She caught at his hand and pressed it to her lips and against her heart. "If our father orders the tents to be folded and the camels loaded, let Ali tell him that we with our son will go with them on their journey."

Ali stood behind immovable as a statue, but for his eyes, which glanced alternately from Veronica to John and back again.



John clasped his wife's fluttering hand and held it firmly within his own.

"It cannot be done, my dear," he said in a tender, grave voice, "at least not to-day, and perhaps not in a week of days. Can I leave my house unguarded for thieves to break in and rob? Can I go away, shut up the workshops, and silence the looms all in a moment?"

"All these matters weigh light as dust in the balance compared with the safety of our son," she said, passionately.

"True, O mother of Daud, but would you have me throw away, as of no account, the heritage of our son? I do not say we must stay here if it is dangerous to remain, but that I must have time to put my affairs in order, to pay off and satisfy the workers, and to find a faithful guardian of my property. Would you wish my son to be a beggar when he comes to the age of Ali?"

If the Germans had meager insight into the mind of the Orient, it was clear that John Culver knew exactly how to adapt both word and imagination to the desired point of view. Zorah's liquid eyes, hesitating, questioning, looked from John to Ali, and back to John.

"What my English brother says is well," said Ali. "Inshallah! He must be given time, but if what he has told us is the truth, what is done should be done quickly."

"Then you must lose no time in getting back to the camp," said John, calculating with the caution and acquired intrigue of the East; but, once roused, pushed by his English blood to prompt action. "Let me know without delay what course Sheikh Mabruk decides to take. I will send a messenger to the town. Before sun-down I shall know whether it will be well to send Zorah

and the boy to the tents of her father while I remain at El Fereidus to finish what must be done."

"No! With you only will I go," said Zorah, agitatedly. "Where the father of my son is, there will his mother be found."

"Zorah, my angel, you will do what is best for the boy," John replied with finality. "And now do not allow your brother to leave the house fasting. Come, the meal is ready. We will go down at once."

## CHAPTER XI

ALI, too impressed to linger even over a meal was soon on the way. An hour later Veronica started for home accompanied by John. Zorah, though eager and nervous, was of one mind with her husband touching the importance of getting reliable news from Opella.

"One thing I omitted to tell you," said Veronica, as they rode up the valley, Murad ahead on his mule. "Herr Rosen is certain to visit us some time to-day. It is his way to repent of his bad temper and then try to atone for it by some extra attention. It will never do for you to meet him."

"Poor Rosen!" said John, quizzically. "He has somehow missed the road to your special good will I can see."

"He has never had any chance of finding it," she replied, quickly, "and now, as an enemy, he is outside the line."

"Be careful! When crossed, Otto Rosen can show a very nasty temper."

"You are as bad as Nicholas," she said, hastily. "Neither of you can teach me how to manage that man. I find it easy enough."

They reached the bridge and in another minute would have crossed to the highway, but a sound of many horses approaching checked their progress. Suddenly a troop of Turkish cavalry came into sight, followed by a carriage and more cavalry behind.

With a hurried exclamation John Culver jumped to the ground, wheeled his own horse half round, and backed Veronica's pony to the shadow of trees at the side of the bridge.

"It must be Ahmed Pasha, the new military commander," he explained, rapidly, "who was not expected till to-morrow. Events are marching. We must wait till they are well ahead."

But for Murad, who halted stockstill and open-mouthed in the middle of the bridge, the general and his escort would have passed by without a glance at the way-side group. The beast, with action particularly mulish, unexpectedly kicked up its heels, pitching its rider into the dust, then promptly turned tail and started on a wild career down the gorge.

With a loud cry Murad scrambled up and started in pursuit, shouting down, as he ran, all imaginable curses on the parentage of the runaway. Curiosity drew every eye in that direction, the clamor even attracting the notice of the important officers in the carriage.

Ahmed Pasha's glance flashed from John Culver to Veronica with keen observation. An officer sitting opposite leaned forward and spoke to him as the carriage went by. At once the pasha turned his head to look again, this time with a gaze of searching scrutiny.

"Oh, you brother of asses!" ejaculated John in Arabic vernacular as he looked after Murad, and then turned a curiously anxious look after the vanishing riders.

"I have seen the new pasha before, John," said Veronica, excitedly. "He was in the hotel this summer for several days. I fancy he recognized me."

"I shouldn't be surprised," he said, slowly, looking at her, "and if I were your mother I should follow Oriental



and not French customs, and never allow you to go out unveiled."

Veronica's eyes widened, and then she laughed gayly. She knew what he meant, but her consciousness of belonging entirely to Pierre put every other man in too remote a perspective to cause her uneasiness. Besides the pasha was out of the plane altogether.

"Let us be getting on," she said, after a pause. "Murad will find his own way home."

What had not penetrated her mind was John's personal idea that Ahmed Pasha's chief attention had fixed upon him, the Englishman, now a suspect to the Turkish mind. For he knew very well the Opella officer who had provoked that second look from the carriage.

"All right, but instead of riding at their heels and perhaps getting into a crowd at the gates let us take the way through the orchards, though a little longer," said John, privately resolving to return later by boat and again avoid the high road. With Zorah and the boy to consider he had no mind for the moment openly to flaunt his nationality.

For similar reasons he took Veronica's advice about Otto Rosen, and to escape a needless encounter went direct to the hospital to consult with Nicholas.

As it happened, Rosen, through no fault of his own, found it impossible to leave the consulate except on important visits to the Wali, the new Commander, and his Austrian colleagues. He could not get off even for an hour till the afternoon of the next day.

Veronica had driven to the orchard in the morning, ostensibly to fetch vegetables and fruit, but in reality to see if Zuleika had brought her a message.

The note which her fingers, cold and shaking with ex-

citement, had discovered when the homing pigeon safely arrived had fluttered from the trees to her neck, she had placed, for greater security, in a tiny charm bag, and hung round her neck in hiding against her breast. When Rosen called she was sitting in a vine-shaded corner of the big veranda over some needlework.

She watched him come out of the corner of her eyes.

"Be temperate! Let him say all he wants to," her mother had said, warning her not willfully to anger him. "Times were never more serious. Invite his confidence by all means. What he will tell you may be of great value. For his statements, though highly colored with his German bias, will not be all false."

Veronica recalled his bad temper with Zia on two occasions, and John's recent word of caution. An hour ago she had had a heated discussion with Nicholas, in which he had sternly forbidden her to go to the orchard again, or anywhere else outside the town gates. Now that the highways were filled with recruits coming and going, soldiers on the march, convoys of supplies merging from all parts on this military center, women were safer under their own roof.

For war was a declared fact. Christians as well as Moslems were being pressed into its service. His work in the hospital had increased out of all measure. Whether he would be allowed to remain in charge or be commandeered to some medical unit on active service was still in the balance. The subject had already been broached.

But all these matters were subservient in Veronica's mind to the central fact of Pierre's proved safe departure from Syria. This knowledge, still potent to lull other alarms, braced her mental attitude and charged

her with courage to face difficulties of the future. The love, deep and soul-swaying, which had grown in her heart with the speed of all growth under Eastern skies, was to her as an impenetrable breastplate from which apprehension still glanced aside without reaching a vital target.

What if Nicholas had to go away? They would feel it deeply, especially little Mother; but so would every mother whose son was called up. It was a cruel destiny that in this way divided and broke up countless families. Still Nicholas would be more favored than others, as whether in hospital or on active service, he would be able to pursue the work he loved. At home surely all would run on smoothly. Zia would still be well cared for, and even if their hearts were desolate and filled with suspense, they would all wait patiently for the war to end, praying that God would soon send peace to the world.

It was after this fashion Veronica's thoughts were working hard when she caught sight of Rosen. A suspicious moisture had dimmed her eyes, while musing, so that his figure seemed blurred. She sat on quietly, taking no notice of his approach, and all the time steeling herself to the encounter.

Rosen always carried his head high, but his customary assurance to-day gave an impression of suppressed excitement, which might signify elation or triumph, or a little of both. Yet as he drew near his steps slackened. He was secretly uncertain how Veronica would receive him, feeling sure that her detestable little niece would have colored their quarrel in her own favor.

That secluded nook on the veranda where Veronica sat seemed isolated from the tumult of the big world outside, cut off from the clamor and intrigue of the tur-

bulent town, which Rosen had left for a brief interlude on the other side of the door in the high wall.

There was a calm loveliness and confidence about the girl sitting serenely at work that called strongly to the home ideal implanted in his Teuton nature. More than that, she appeared to him, in some mysterious way, a dream type of that Germania which, unperturbed and steadfast, watched over and guided the conquering arms of her devoted sons.

Suddenly, in spite of his manifold preoccupations, and the dual growth of ambition and the authority he loved, he began to dream of the possibilities of a parallel existence full of intimate joys and the repose of home life. And his dream circled solely round the figure of Veronica, making her the object of a passionate desire eternally to have and to hold somewhere apart from the ugliness of a world at war.

In quick response to the sentimental twist of imagination he now hurried up the veranda stairs. Many a time he had kissed Veronica's hand before, but never with the lover's ardor of to-day.

Veronica, incensed, could scarcely resist lifting her free hand to administer a smart box on the ears. His action, harmless enough when strictly ceremonial, had become a liberty, above all to one whose hands and lips belonged to another.

She snatched her hand away. He looked at her reproachfully, and suddenly depressed.

"You are still angry?" he asked.

"Angry? Not at all. Why should I be angry?" she said, coldly, feeling momentarily that now Pierre was safely on the sea nothing else mattered, and that she could and must defy this man.



"Because I have been long in coming. Believe me, it was unavoidable."

Veronica's eyes still sparkled, though her cheeks colored by anger had turned again to their clear pallor.

"These are days when a man's time is not at his own disposal. Shall I call mother, or is it Nicholas you have come to see?" she said, evasively, and again fell industriously to work, chafing at his obtuseness.

"Don't trifle with me, Veronica," he said, earnestly. "You know very well I have slipped away with enormous difficulty to see you and you only. Chiefly to make my peace with you."

"But I have no quarrel with you, Herr Rosen," she said, flashing a look at him.

"Nothing serious, I hope," he replied, nervously adjusting his eyeglasses, "but I am sensitive to the least change in your manner towards me. Let us come to such an understanding, that doubt with each other will never enter our hearts."

He made a gesture as if again to seize her hand. Veronica, putting down her work, managed at the same time to draw back her chair. She felt chilled inwardly with the effort to repress her true feelings, while searching for a way out of the position.

"Evidently you imagine doubt where none exists," she said, trying to speak as one good friend to another. "You mean well, I am sure, but you are apt to be hasty, as for instance with our delicate little Zia, yet you have a good heart, and you know what your German proverb says, ende gut, alles gut!"

It did not occur to her that the kindness of her voice, though forced, was a direct encouragement. His brow instantly cleared.

"Now I am certain of your full forgiveness," he said, eagerly. "I was hasty. It is my nature, unhappily. To show my regret, look what I have brought," he dived into his pockets, "two boxes of chocolates for Zia instead of the one I took away. My heart is good at bottom, and, believe me, it beats only for you my beautiful Veronica."

"You must not say that," she stammered.

"Don't put me off again, my dear, good Veronica," he said, vehemently, this time capturing her hand, and attempting to draw her into his arms. "You know how devotedly I love you. Your mother knows. She must have told you. I confessed everything to her."

"You have no right to hold me, Herr Rosen," said the girl, escaping from him, "and what you tell my mother has nothing to do with me."

Baffled but by no means rebuffed, he stood looking at her with both passion and reproach in his eyes. How could he in any way subdue this wayward, beloved being to his will? She must in reality love him. He was quite assured of that.

"Sit down! Don't be frightened," he said, suddenly, forcibly controlling himself. "Let us talk quietly together. I want to tell you how our love for each other will not only create unspeakable happiness for us both, but be the means of rendering the greatest service to your family during the war."

"Love for each other?" she queried, coldly. "When have I given you any reason to imagine that I loved you?"

"Always," he responded at white heat, "with your eyes, your voice, your music, your songs, you have always encouraged me to think so."

"You have no right to say that," she interrupted, hotly.

"Can you honestly say you were ignorant of my feelings towards you?" he said, vehemently.

"Not altogether, but it is false to say I ever encouraged you."

"Unconsciously, Veronica, unconsciously, since the other displeases you," he said, raising his voice, excitedly. "No man could be near you and not love you, and you know it. One thing I know well myself, though, that if any other man dares to step in between you and me, I will—" he broke off, abruptly, the threat choked by a quick rebirth of suspicion, "but there is no other man, is there, Veronica?"

He bent forward to look her full in the face. An ominous light glimmered in his eyes.

"Is there another man?" he repeated, grimly.

Under his look and at his words her face went red and white by turns. Waves of hot color surged from within and swept over her cheeks to the very tips of her fingers.

"How dare you look at me like that?" she exclaimed, defiantly, with flashing eyes.

Otto Rosen's gaze shifted, as if automatically, into space above her head. His teeth set rigidly together. Bitterness and rage consumed him inwardly, his breast heaved.

"It is the Frenchman," he snapped, viciously. "Deny it if you can!"

"You insult me! You are cruel!" gasped Veronica. "No girl could love a man like you."

Her flushed cheek turned pale as her fortitude suddenly forsook her. She hid her face in her hands and began to weep convulsively.

Startled and dismayed, with rapid revulsion of feeling Rosen flung himself on his knees before her.

"Forgive me, forgive me! I would not wound you willingly for all the world," he poured out, distractedly. "I know I am bad-tempered and horribly jealous, even of the air that touches your cheek. I beseech you, my beloved Veronica, my sweet, dear girl, dry your tears. I will never give you reason to shed them again. You shall—"

"You must get up at once! Somebody may come and see you," she said in a choked voice, drying her eyes. "It is useless to quarrel, but if we are to remain friends you must never say such things to me again. I cannot bear it."

Subdued even to the point of instant obedience Rosen got up and stood over her silently, feeling that he would gladly renounce every other dream of his life, and the bliss of heaven itself, if only once he could hold her in his arms and hear a word of love from her lips. He had never dreamed it was possible for him to feel for any woman as he felt for her. It was madness, he knew, but nothing else mattered in the world.

All at once a door close at hand was flung open and Amina hurried forward. At sight of Rosen she stopped abruptly, but recovering herself came close up to Veronica in spite of his scowling look.

"Come at once, little lady, without delay," she said in a hushed, excited voice.

"What is the matter?" said Veronica, startled, springing to her feet.

"The Sitt wants you. It is very pressing," and Amina ran back to the house, followed as quickly by her young mistress.



Rosen instantly suspected a ruse, a pre-arranged plan of again putting him off. He clutched his hat, caught up the boxes of chocolates, and strode off impetuously. At the head of the stairs his steps wavered and came to a standstill. He had begun to debate furiously with himself, whether to wait for Veronica's possible return, or to act with finality and leave the house never to enter it again. While still hesitating he heard a voice calling him.

"Effendi! Effendi! Will it please you graciously to come. You are wanted," and Amina reappeared before him, flurried and heated.

Perplexed, but acutely gratified and relieved, he followed the woman, who led him to a small anteroom at the end of the lewan.

Here his eyes fell on an agitated group gathered round the figure of an old black woman who sat hunched up on the floor, rocking herself to and fro in a paroxysm of grief.

Mme. Severin, seated on the edge of a divan, was bending over her strange visitor with pale and worried face. Close by, whispering together with repressed excitement, stood Amina and Murad. Veronica knelt beside the old woman. She had taken her by the hand and was talking to her quickly yet soothingly.

"What is it?" asked Rosen, hurrying up to her genuinely concerned.

"A dreadful thing has happened," she said, looking up. "John Culver has been arrested. He is in some prison, and no one knows what has become of his wife and child."

"John Culver in prison?" repeated Rosen, taken aback and scenting a complication for which he had

little relish. He spoke as if trying to call back the name.

"You know him well. The brother-in-law of Nicholas and Zia's uncle. A man who has lived all his life under Turkish rule, paying his taxes loyally, like his father before him, with the best of Turkey's subjects," said Anna Severin in a deep emphatic voice. "To me he was like a second son."

"Ai! Ai! Ai!" wailed the woman on the floor, though not a word was intelligible to her, the conversation being carried on as usual in French.

"Who brought the news?" he asked, shortly, twisting with nervous speed the long points of his mustache.

"This woman who was the household cook. She is still too agitated to give many details," said Mme. Severin.

"It was only the day before yesterday I rode out to El Fereidus to visit them," said Veronica, looking up. "John came back with me to the town thinking that Murad alone was not sufficient escort."

"Quite right!" nodded Rosen, approvingly.

"He also wanted to see Nicholas, and find out the truth about affairs, but it was chiefly on my account he came to the town," continued Veronica, rapidly, "and now I feel it is all my fault."

"You see he was arrested that same day when passing through the town gate on his way home," explained Mme. Severin. "The woman says that a guard of soldiers came to the house that night. They kept her busy cooking for them all yesterday. Early this morning she managed to slip away, but has been long in getting here because she was afraid of being followed and put in prison. You know how timid these people are. Whether the wife and child were taken away by the

military, or whether by some means or other they escaped she cannot tell. They have disappeared without leaving trace of any kind. The silk factory is to be run for government purposes, and the house used for military officials. The men on guard talked of these matters without reserve."

"Oh dear, oh dear, whatever can we do!" cried Veronica. "Poor innocent John clapped in prison like a common thief. The Zorah he adores and their beautiful boy not to be found. It is infamous. Should the news reach him in prison it will kill him."

"It is all because he is an Englishman," put in Mme. Severin. "Otto, my friend, will all English subjects be arrested?"

"They will certainly be interned, and not only the English, but all enemy aliens," he said, stiffly.

"But John Culver is our relative and friend," Veronica protested with warmth. She sprang to her feet and stood provocatively before him. "Now, Herr Rosen, is the moment to test the strength of your friendship for us. Procure his freedom! You can if you choose."

Rosen looked darkly at her, a strife of cross feelings struggling within him and showing outwardly in his rapidly changing expression.

"Your influence at the Serai and with the Wali would go far," suggested Mme. Severin, persuasively.

"What is Nicholas doing?" he asked, abruptly. "Where is he?"

Mon Dieu! He knows nothing at all so far. He has had to visit some important out-patients, and took Zia with him in the carriage. It will be a great blow to hear that his wife's brother has been treated like this."

"Have no fear, Mamotschka," said Veronica, confidently. "Herr Rosen is going to put this injustice straight."

Otto Rosen's face was a study while she spoke. He flashed her a queer questioning look, then turned and paced a few steps up and down, his head bent, his fingers still busied with his mustache.

"You must realize that the arrest is quite in order with war regulations. There is no chance of Culver's release," he said, halting suddenly, and speaking directly to Veronica. "I may possibly procure amelioration of his treatment as a prisoner. For this I will do my best."

"That is always something," said Mme. Severin, slowly.

"But not enough," Veronica added, imperiously. "We want to know the truth about Zorah and the boy. It is impossible for them to have vanished into thin air without the knowledge of the officials who ordered this cruel raid on El-Fereidus. You will not fail to find out, Herr Rosen?"

"It will certainly be difficult," he said, uneasily.

"What does that matter if you gain your end?" she retorted, not realizing the double significance of her words till she saw the light leap into his eyes.

Personally he cared not a jot whether John Culver ever regained his liberty or not. As for the wife and child the ambiguity of their fate was but part and parcel of the fortune of war. Yet to please Veronica he was willing to move certain levers of influence, secretly, discreetly.

For by doing so to success, he would gain the end for which he was striving so ardently. She, herself, had said it. He would hold her to her word.



"Ende gut, alles gut? Is that still your true and final word?" he said, significantly, in a low voice, coming close up to her.

"Yes, certainly!" she replied, fearlessly.

"Good!" he ejaculated and looked at his watch. "The sooner I begin the better. Besides I have important engagements already overdue and a host of pressing business matters to settle."

He turned to Mme. Severin.

"Au revoir, dear Madame! Let me have any new details you can gather later from the woman. They will all help."

## CHAPTER XII

IN days of suspense which followed nothing more definite was added to the narrative of the old black woman. Over the subsequent fate of John Culver after his sudden arrest at the town gates hung an impenetrable veil. Similar obscurity blotted out Zorah and her boy. Nicholas tried familiar means of underground enquiry but discovered nothing fresh. Even Ali, whose coming and going never failed, showed no sign of life.

Had recruiting agents got hold of him? The Severins did not think so. Rather had John's prophecy of coming disaster driven him swiftly to cover.

"Probably the whole camp has made a bolt for safety," said Nicholas. "They would strike tents and move away the same night that Ali took them the message from John."

"In that case Zorah could not possibly be with them unless Ali was able to get back to the house in John's absence," said Veronica. "Yet old Fatima would have known that."

"Not of necessity," put in Madame Severin, "and I really don't think it possible for Zorah to have played her husband such a trick, for she would have had to start without even knowing of his arrest. All the same, mother love may have driven her to take a desperate step while brooding alone."

One of their surmises was soon verified. Nicholas coming in one day said he had just heard that the Beni-Weldeh encampment was actually broken up and

not a trace left in its wake. A quick swift Rahil had evidently followed the sudden news of an approaching danger. Nothing further could be known till some sign reached them through Ali himself or a deputy.

"The only alternative is to wait and see what Otto Rosen finds out," said Mme. Severin.

"What he has done you mean," amended Veronica. "If he chooses to act he can get John freed. If not, why then I have finished with him."

The angry passage with Herr Rosen had left a strong impression on Zia. Highly strung and always frail, a mental upset generally reacted on her weak body in a way that only her father rightly understood. His indignation with Rosen had been the stronger for its necessary repression.

So far every one had succeeded in keeping from the child the bad news about her Uncle John. This was all the easier because conscription had carried off Murad, and Amina left alone would not for worlds divulge anything to bring a tear to the eyes of the child she adored.

Zia had not escaped reproof from her grandmother for display of temper to Herr Rosen when a guest of the house.

"But I tell you Mémé it was Herr Rosen who first lost his temper," protested the child petulantly, "because he wanted to know what Monsieur Marson talked about and I would not tell him."

"Unless you had first told him Monsieur Marson was with us that evening Herr Rosen would have known nothing at all about his visit, my little one," said Mme. Severin, firmly. "I have told you before you are not to chatter about our visitors. You will know the reason when you are older."

"But I didn't say what we talked about," protested Zia, with a catch in her voice.

Mme. Severin kissed the quivering little face. "Because my little girl knows even at her age the difference between honorable and dishonorable behavior. That is a lesson you have learnt well, *chérie*."

Then in a few simple words she explained that now Turkey had entered the great European war France was no longer a neutral in the Ottoman empire, and that when Monsieur Marson dined with them in the garden he was already Herr Rosen's enemy, and might easily have been prevented from going back to France. "So once again, *petite*, remember you must never tell the names of any of our guests to Herr Rosen or to anybody else. It might mean bad consequences for all of us, and disaster for our visitors."

"What bad consequences? Will they kill us and make us martyrs like—" began the child, excitedly.

"Hush, my dove!" said the grandmother, soothingly. "Perhaps some one might be put in prison."

"Prison!" echoed the child, still showing agitation.

"Or at any rate made to pay a big fine of money, or perhaps tortured," said Mme. Severin, meditatively, as if for an instant off guard. "Who can tell! You must never forget to say your prayers diligently, and ask to be made brave. Heaven knows you will need every help they can give you in life, *petite*."

Nicholas Severin disapproved of this enlightenment for Zia. His mother disagreed and in the end he yielded the point seeing that it might prevent further mischief. For at all times their house had been a place of refuge for hardly pressed compatriots. In such times as the present even the silence of a child had to be ensured.



"She has a loyal soul," said Mme. Severin warmly, "and now she knows the necessity will be mute as a fish."

All the same Zia showed stubborn reluctance to accept Rosen's peace-offering of chocolates. It was just as well he was not present when they were put into her hands for she dashed the boxes to the floor. A child's confidence once outraged is not readily renewed, and this was one of singularly intense and sensitive feeling, due perhaps to the blending of her Eastern and Western blood.

A week went by before Otto Rosen paid his next visit to the house, a hurried one late one evening. Since the town had filled with military bustle the gate in the high wall was kept bolted by day as well as night. Amina hastened to open directly she heard the loud demand of the kawass for admittance. With an order to the kawass to drive on, execute a commission, and then return and wait for him the German consul entered and walked up to the house.

The room into which he was ushered was poorly lighted by one petroleum lamp burning low, a different illumination from that which prevailed on days when he was expected. He scarcely gave himself time to make the usual greetings to Mme. Severin and Nicholas before turning to Veronica. The confident intimacy of his manner and look at once affronted her.

"You come to give us news of course. Is it satisfactory?" she asked distantly.

About to reply he stopped short, his gaze arrested by a figure in black seated on the divan. At once Mme. Severin's voice broke the silence.

"You can speak freely, my friend. Pastor Kasbarian

is a family connection of my husband. I cannot recall if you have met each other before," and she made the formal introduction, adding that their relative was visiting Opella to say good-by to his son who had been called up for military service.

Pastor Kasbarian rose to his feet, showing a long gaunt body, which gathered itself slowly up as if none too ready to make this new acquaintance. Otto Rosen, bowing stiffly, received an impression of a black bearded face in which one eye only burned like a live coal, while its fellow was extinct under the closed shrunken lid.

"Pastor Kasbarian hoped to obtain exemption for his son, but has not succeeded so far," said Dr. Severin.

"If his son enjoys good health it seems only fair from the German standpoint that all Christians, especially the young, should help the Moslems to bear the burden of military service," was Otto Rosen's comment, taking his seat by Veronica.

"If only there be no treachery," said the pastor in a deep rough voice.

"That would be out of the question if Christian loyalty always encouraged the Turks to believe in it."

"My good sir, have you been long in Asia Minor?" asked Pastor Kasbarian.

"Some eight years," returned Rosen, aggressively. "You can safely presume that I know what I am talking about. There are Armenians at this moment in the Russian army. Isn't that sufficient proof of Christian disloyalty to Turkey?"

Veronica turned indignant eyes on the speaker, her look plainly stating that such an attack on their guest reached the limit of her toleration.

"Yes, Armenians who were Russian subjects before the war, and so came under conscription. Surely you know that," thrust in Nicholas, quietly.

"There are others. I can cite hundreds," snapped Rosen. "No colony of Armenians settled abroad has yet attempted to come back and fight for Turkey."

"I should think not, indeed," Veronica burst in with passion in her voice. "Those colonies consist solely of Armenians who have managed with great difficulty to escape murder at the hands of the Turks."

"Veronica!" called her mother, sharply, then continued in a tense voice. "Loyalty is of small value unless reciprocal, Herr Rosen. Our relative's experience of Turkish loyalty has been bitter. He lost his eye in defending his family during the massacres of 1909. Not all were saved even then, and another son fell in action fighting for Turkey in the Balkan war. The son for whom he seeks exemption is the only one left. You see his Christian loyalty to the Turkish over-lords has already demanded a heavy toll."

With distinct uneasiness Rosen stared for a few seconds at Pastor Kasbarian, who sat with bent head, troubled and brooding.

"Certainly that is a melancholy family history," he said, deliberately, "but as my time is limited your relative will excuse my entering into his troubles at the present moment. You asked me a question"; he turned again to Veronica. "As I promised I have made every effort but with poor result."

"What do you mean?" she asked, impetuously. "You keep us in suspense. Is Mr. Culver out of prison? Have you found out anything about his wife and child?"

He shook his head and then replied, "You have no idea

of the difficulties that occur in investigating any side issues to-day. In the face of all that is happening, and the high pressure of military preparations this matter, however important to those concerned, simply does not count."

"Oh, doesn't it!" said Veronica, sarcastically. "Personal affairs must all be dropped then. Is that what you mean?"

He gave her a side glance, at once eager and furtive.

"Oh, dear no, only those personal affairs that interrupt work devoted to the one all-important business."

"The business of war, I suppose," she said, indifferently. "War, and always the war these days! Why are you men always trying to take by force something that does not belong to you? Why do you not prefer peace, and try to make life always happy and beautiful?"

"Because the root of war lies in human nature itself," he said, propounding the platitude in the tone of one who humors a spoilt child, "and as long as human nature remains unchanged there will always be war."

"War is detestable. It is a sin against humanity," she retorted warmly.

"On the other hand eternal peace is a dream, said our wise Moltke, and not even a beautiful dream. The ideal of perpetual peace has always been the pet Utopian delusion of exhausted and spiritless ages," he said sententiously.

"This is all beside the point, Veronica, and I am sure Herr Rosen has something else of importance to tell us," put in Mme. Severin, uneasily aware that it was breath wasted to try and disabuse the German mind of its own pet delusion that war was a good thing.



Otto Rosen adjusted his pince-nez and, looking straight ahead, began to speak in a stubborn voice.

"You must recognize that the English are in particularly bad odor with the Turkish authorities just now. The prisoners made, they intend to hold, and are even unwilling to grant them privileges. On the other hand orders for general fair treatment have been issued to officials in Syria, who will be held responsible for the safety of individual English subjects."

"So far so good," said Mme. Severin, "but I should like to know where John Culver is."

"He is interned in Damascus."

"Not in the public prison I hope," said Nicholas.

"In the public prison," repeated Rosen dryly, "and considering that it is to the English nation alone we owe all the mischief of this war the public prison is good enough for any Englishman. Remember Amasia! That was entirely due to English perfidy," he added, significantly.

He alluded to a tragic episode following Napoleon's famous expedition to the East, which had been recently recalled to public notice in the French-press through the research of a noted traveler. It seemed that after the Convention of El Arish, signed Jan. 28, 1800, the English had given up a number of captured French soldiers to the Turks. Ten of these were conducted as far as Amasia in Asia Minor, and there offered their lives and a new start in life if they would become Moslems. Five had consented to adopt the turban. The five who refused were then shut up in one of the ancient rock tombs of the cliff overlooking the town.

For two years the wretched prisoners lingered in this purgatory, and then still refusing to renounce their faith

were taken out and put to death. The tradition of their slow torture in the tomb was still preserved in Amasia, wrote the traveler. He had discovered their names cut into the stone walls of the cells.

Only a few months back Otto Rosen had been present when Mme. Severin had received a French newspaper giving full details of the whole episode and announcing the intention of the "Oeuvre du Souvenir Francais" of erecting a monument to the memory of the five martyred soldiers. They had talked long and with deep interest of the subject.

Rosen's inopportune reminder of the sad story struck them dumb. Veronica's throat contracted painfully. Where once she had regarded Rosen with indifference she felt more and more that she was growing to hate his very presence. Pastor Kasbarian merely smiled, a slow, terrible smile suggestive of sinister reminiscences compared with which the fate of the French soldiers seemed a mild and merciful one.

"I hold no brief for the English nation, but surely you are strongly prejudiced, my friend," said Mme. Severin, speaking at last with evident effort.

"Ask the Turks," he replied with warmth, "how by intrigue long before the war the English tried their best to force the emirs of Rashid, Mushammerah and Koweit to form themselves into a confederacy under an English protectorate."

"Do you really believe it?" asked Nicholas, knowing that Rosen had embarked on a subject that was a fixed idea with most Germans.

"I know it to be true. I have every proof," said Rosen angrily. "Their grand surveyor, Willecocks, while pretending to study the matter of irrigation was

making plans all the time to send home to his government. You would be amazed to hear how many secret treaties he made with Arab sheikhs of Mesopotamia. Luckily the Arabs are true only to the highest bidder for their favors, though if ever the English manage by luck or treachery to get within measurable distance of Bagdad you will see how they will tempt and impose upon those same ignorant folk."

"Then the only remedy is for Germany to hold Bagdad, Basra, and the Persian Gulf."

"This is as vital to Turkey as to ourselves, otherwise the gates of the East are closed for both. If England attempts to enter Mesopotamia she must be thoroughly beaten, for if her army united with that of Egypt, Turkey would be cut off from Arabia. Syria would go next and England's cursed power would be stronger than ever."

He spoke with peculiar bitterness for reasons fully understood by Nicholas Severin. Irrigation works on the Tigris and Euphrates at a cost of two millions had been put up for Turkey by a famous English engineer and his staff. This was another fruitful source of anger and discontent to the Germans, and very soon through these masters of Turkey the British engineer-in-chief, Mr. Arthur Whitley, was to become a prisoner of war in spite of his excellent relations with Enver Pasha himself.

"That would also mean the end of German power in the East," said Mme. Severin, slowly.

"Never!" exclaimed Rosen with violence, rising suddenly from his seat. "Germany can never be beaten."

"Don't go yet, Otto! The tea is ready," cried Mme. Severin as Veronica, who had been busying herself at a

side table over a samovar, suddenly turned round with a tray in her hand. "Serve Herr Rosen first, my child!"

Veronica came silently to him. He noticed that she was paler than usual, and how dark semi-circles under her eyes, in which burned a wistful fire, gave her a delicate look to which he was unaccustomed. Was she fretting about this objectionable Englishman? Impossible! He remembered how she had spoken of war. It was the sense of all it involved that was depressing her feminine nature.

"I am going to Damascus myself the end of the week," he said in a confidential voice, taking a glass of the lemon scented tea. "You shall hear the result directly I return."

"Do you hear, mamouschka?" she called with quick animation. "Herr Rosen says he is going to Damascus."

"Is it possible to convey a message through you to my brother-in-law?" asked Nicholas.

"I might manage a written one provided you show me the contents," said Rosen affably. "Let me have it to-morrow some time. I will see what I can do."

He started to take leave and as he spoke pressed Veronica's hand reassuringly. It was easy to yield a point when for reward he saw how it brought back a tinge of rose to her cheeks and light to her eyes.

Pastor Kasbarian's glance, somber and fierce, watched him leave the room with Nicholas.

"I do not like the German, cousin Anna," he said, morosely. "I foresee that you will regret you ever let him enter your house. He is a man with a narrow eye."

"The war has changed him. He is no longer the same.



This is the first time he has brought in the Armenian question," she said, with a troubled look at Veronica, whose eyes agreed with the cousin's verdict, "but he was never careful in weighing his words."

"He should have gone one step further and stated that all our young men are being enrolled by the Turks," he said. "Of what use will the old be to protect women and children?"

"Heaven forbid that it will be necessary," said Mme. Severin, hastily. "To-day we are all in one boat. Surely we shall sink or swim together, Turk and Armenian alike."

After mother and daughter went to bed Nicholas and their visitor sat talking earnestly far into the night. They arranged that the family's next holiday should be spent under Pastor Kasbarian's roof in a prosperous village on a hill slope commanding a view of the Mediterranean.

"The sea air will be good for Zia," said Mme. Severin next day, "and we shall be within easy reach of Nicholas."

"If he is still here," said Veronica, significantly.

Three weeks elapsed before Rosen returned with startling news from Damascus. John Culver had escaped from prison. How and when was not actually established. The Severins doubted the good faith of Rosen's informant, fearing that something sinister lay at the back of the communication. Possibilities of death, treachery, torture, privation and other details of Oriental ill treatment often suffered in the public prison passed through their minds. Their one hope lay in Rosen's reminder of the official orders touching British prisoners. Not that he cared a jot beyond desiring to pose in a

cloak of high-minded benevolence in the eyes of Veronica.

He said something privately to her that suggested he himself had lent a hand to John's escape. She taxed him with it, throwing a warmth into her voice and glance that smothered his first impulse of repudiation. He shrugged his shoulders with an affected carelessness.

"Indirectly it is possible to act at times, but only in the strictest secrecy. All traces must be covered," he said, mysteriously.

She looked at him, summing him up, doubting and half convinced. He could not be altogether bad if he had really done this.

"Do good and throw it in the sea," she replied, quoting an Arab proverb, "for if the fish do not know it Allah will."

"I said I would do my best. One can't do more," he said, his fingers busy at his mustache.

With a flash of insight she detected his insincerity. Yet she deemed it politic still to stimulate belief, with the result that he left highly pleased with his diplomatic stroke.

On the other hand he foresaw trouble lying ahead through his intimacy with the Severin family. In addition to their local standing of well-to-do Armenians of European upbringing, they possessed an English relative, were friendly in heart to the French, and there were the Russian connections of Mme. Severin herself. Once Veronica was his wife, and he now saw every chance of winning to the heart of her, all these annoying links with Germany's enemies should be snapped. He would have none of them.

Later in his office he threw up his head and laughed maliciously. The scene of a prison court he had wit-

nessed secretly with a Damascus official had suddenly come back to his mind. While scrutinizing Turkey's interned enemies to discover John Culver among them it had given him rare satisfaction to view those boastful knights of the daily tub, the finnikin Englishmen, set in that unsavory revolting milieu. As one of the standard bearers of Teutonic "kultur" into foreign lands it had always been the English more than any other race that had inflamed to burning point his feeling of bitter envy—that Neid—which is a leading trait of modern Germany.

## CHAPTER XIII

TO Veronica the winter seemed interminably long. Especially the days dragged when imagination keyed to suspense waited for news to percolate through the rigorous censorship of telegrams from Europe, and the horizon of life seemed no further away than the nearest roof top. There were drab leaden days when her heart, feeding on torpid hopes, grew sick with unutterable longing, when the stagnation of all other interests clogged energy, and despair dulled mistily every outlook on the future.

And always there came to torment and excite by turn recollection of Pierre's confidence in a speedy return. She never passed through the bazaars without scanning the passers-by while recalling his words to Nicholas.

"I guarantee the next time we run across each other as to-day you will pass me without the least recognition."

But she would certainly know him under any guise. On that score she had no doubts. Yet there were other ways. At whatever hour through the winter she climbed to the roof terrace to scatter morsels of bread as was her custom, and watched the sea birds, invisible the minute before, instantly descend and fly around, she thought of the French aviators who had flown only a year ago from Nancy to Cairo by way of Asia Minor and Syria.

For a week in advance Dancourt, the first of the aviators, had been daily expected, news of the famous trial flight having traveled swiftly ahead. When first



seen on the horizon above the hills she remembered the great cries that had ascended from the watching crowds, and how quickly their wonder and admiration at the sight had turned to silence mixed with terror as the great blue bird, coming, nearing and swooping low with a magnificent curve, seemed momentarily to hover over the thronged roofs before taking fresh flight into the blue. Later in the year a second aviator had appeared, and then a third, all from France. The impression created on the Eastern mind by these miraculous fliers had been indescribable, for they were the first to appear or to be seen at all in that corner of the world.

Veronica thrilled ever at the memory. To her it had become a symbol of the great love which had come to her from France. She even had wild ideas that perhaps Pierre might return on wings through the air like another Perseus. It would be a real rescue, for Rosen's persistency was getting beyond bounds. Long ago she would have dared the consequences of open rupture but for the caution advised by her mother and insisted upon by Nicholas. Even so the man must have opaque scales on his eyes not to be aware of the repugnance he instilled in her for she could not always succeed in hiding it.

At all times Rosen was a barometer showing every variation of military and naval conflict. If these were of German origin his mood was not only set fair but overwrought. His skeptical attitude was very significant when questioned upon adverse reports from the Caucasus, of havoc and terror in Palestine, and famine in the Lebanon. That lies and fraud concealed grave trouble, hushed up, yet alive, in many quarters of Turkey in Asia, was proved by secret evidence of travelers, both

native and neutral, whose difficulties grew week by week.

To rumors current in the bazaars and khans of the town, and fairly in touch with actual fact, there was always the insidious counterblast circulated by Germany's native agents.

"A Russian victory in the Caucasus!"

"Armenians helped to win it," buzzed in ominous reply.

"The British have cast the Khedive out of Egypt and set up a new sultan.

"They have done this because Abbas Helmi was a friend of the German Emperor, who is a true father to Islam."

"What do the Moslem Egyptians say to this strange action?"

"As the new Sultan is also a son of Mahomet it pleases them to forget that the British have stolen the treasures and rich valleys of Egypt."

"Allah is good! The world changes!" was the pious comment.

"But to what advantage if free men are in this way to be made the slaves of infidels?"

To Veronica's relief it was always England and not France that inflamed Rosen's chief animosity. The hoisting of the Union Jack at Basra by British troops from India had been a bitter pill to swallow. Until doubly confirmed he paid no heed to the declared disaster to German cruisers off the Falkland Islands.

"Wait!" he said, grimly. "Antwerp is ours. It will be London's turn soon. Even now we are preparing another blow at the heart of England, one she little expects."

Shortly he brought them German newspapers to read,

revealing the meaning of these mysterious hints. Whole columns were devoted to the coming invasion of Egypt. All was set down in detail. The military preparations at military centers such as Damascus, Aleppo and particularly Jerusalem, into which city were pouring enthusiastic deputations from all parts of the country. The route across the desert of Sinai, the Bedouin hovering like locusts to the east of Suez, all was described. Over against all this was painted the seething anxiety of hard pressed British officials, military and civil.

"Remarkable! Incredible!" ejaculated Mme. Severin, for once heedless of Rosen's susceptibilities. "Never once have I been in any part of Syria without hearing the praises of the English sung on all sides, and the people's outspoken wish for the same British rule that existed in Egypt. What has brought this change of heart? Is it secret intrigue of Turkey, or your own country?"

"Intrigue?" he repeated. "Of course! It is the only way. Without intrigue who and what can ever appeal to the Oriental mind? And why, I should like to know, should we abstain from what gained India for England?"

"It is the preaching of the Jihad alone which has made this possible," she said severely. "It is a terrible weapon to forge."

Otto Rosen laughed, a laugh for which Veronica's eyes flashed fire at him.

"The end has not yet come," he said ambiguously, "and scarcely the beginning. Wait till the Holy Flag gets to Jerusalem. It is on its way."

"The Holy Flag!" exclaimed the listening woman.

"Yes! To accompany the army to the battlefields of

Egypt, the first time for four hundred years," he said, triumphantly. "Is there a Mussulman anywhere that will not be drawn by the magic of that blood red banner to fight in our ranks? Arab, Bedouin, Indian, even Egyptian will all come. The Eastern question is about to be settled once more and forever. We are on the eve of great events."

But all this fine talk and other endless gossip still kept the actual reality of war at a distance till something suddenly occurred to drive it home to their very threshold.

One evening Amina burst in upon the family, weeping, breathless and talking excitedly.

"Murad is here. He is weary of barracks," she said.

"Heavens! What does it mean?" exclaimed Mme. Severin, turning to her son.

"That he has deserted I fear. I will go and see," he said, hastily, leaving the room.

So it turned out. Talked to and advised by the whole family in every possible way Murad was at last persuaded that his best and only chance of pardon lay in giving himself up to the military authorities. He stayed the night in the house and went out early in the morning.

"Malaish! No matter!" he ejaculated in response to Amina's tears.

Later on a soldier contrived to slip round to the hospital to divulge secretly that his comrade was in danger of his life. For there was to be a court martial. So many desertions were taking place all the time. As a rule the men did not return, but joined the gangs of highwaymen infesting the country round. Murad was to provide an example.

Could he be saved? If so only by urgent action. Nicholas Severin set his teeth determinedly, for to him



personally no good could come of interference. On the contrary, he might be held responsible for sheltering a deserter for the night under his roof even though an old servant.

He went to the Wali with whom as a hakim, the most discreet and successful, his intimacy gave him weight. The Wali amiably referred him to Ahmed Pasha as if relieved to shift the affair to other shoulders.

At the Serai he expected to wait long before obtaining an audience. To his surprise the commandant saw him without any delay, though never had the forecourt, arcades and ante-chamber been more thronged with officers, soldiers and attendants of all kinds.

The customary salutations over the Pasha of his own accord graciously alluded to the occasions on which they had met before, in the hospital and again in the mountain hotel.

"What affair is it that brings us together here, effendi?" he asked.

"A boon, Excellency," replied Nicholas, proceeding to explain that it was mercy for a truant soldier he begged because the man had been a faithful servant, and if spared might yet become a trusty and valiant fighter for the Sultan.

"Clemency to a deserter will but incite others to do the same," was the temporizing reply.

"Excellency, he did not realize his crime nor its penalty until I put both before him."

The Pasha spoke rapidly with an officer who sat beside him on the divan, then his strong imperious face looked again upon Nicholas.

"It is a question of discipline which has to be finally decided in Damascus. This however I will promise re-

membering your treatment of a valued servant of my own. I myself will send a petition for the life of this man and ask that the answer may come quickly."

Severin, almost overcome by the unexpected easy success of his prayer for mercy, stammered out his gratitude with customary etiquette. Silence had fallen upon the officers sitting and standing round the room, a silence heavy with a hostility felt to the full by the doctor in the very atmosphere. He knew the question that was circulating from mind to mind. Why this condescension, this favor to one of the Armenian race even though of the reputable calling of hakim? One or two men standing in the entrance slipped hurriedly away.

Ahmed Pasha's gray eyes glanced keenly around and back to Severin, whose attitude though deferential had no trace of servility.

"Please God I shall be able to grant you this boon, doctor," he said in a clear voice, apparently so that all might hear, touching his forehead and his breast courteously as Severin withdrew.

All the same Nicholas had so little faith in Turkish or any Moslem "Inshallahs" that he was a little suspicious of the promise made by His Excellency the commandant. With reason too it seemed when it leaked out, soon to be talked of excitedly in every café of Opella, that the German officer in joint command with Ahmed Pasha still insisted upon a court martial and justice being administered to the deserter.

Severin hurried off to Rosen, who flatly refused to intervene. "Discipline is discipline, my good doctor," he exclaimed, testily. "No, it is not a question of brutality and intolerance, nothing of the kind. Be careful what you say! It is solely the necessity of making an ex-

ample. Overlook one and hundreds would take a similar liberty believing they would be condoned."

To the horror of the Severin family Murad was condemned to death. Soon it leaked out that a row of eight soldiers had been drawn up to fire at him, while by order of the German C. O. another row had stood ready to fire at the eight in front should they refuse to shoot. To this extent had German discipline strengthened defiance among the badly treated troops who were already mutinous.

Before sunset that same day a free pardon for poor Murad came through by wire from headquarters at Damascus, where the military prestige of Ahmed Pasha was fully understood. Public opinion was enraged. Nothing was talked about but the brutal behavior of the German officer and the Pasha's anger. Was it possible for both to remain in command together? Evidently not for it turned out that just such a martinet was badly needed at Jerusalem, headquarters for the army to operate against Egypt.

A fresh high officer and staff were quickly sent on from Constantinople to manipulate the German thumb-screws in Opella with more tact than the predecessor. Draft after draft of soldiers were sent south as soon as ready. Soon these were followed by thousands of workmen employed on the Bagdad railway.

To take the place of these last in making necessary roads and fortifications orders were given for the special formation of battalions of Armenians all of military age. In spite of care taken in the collection of these labor troops a great many young men happily contrived to escape and slip through the net.

Nicholas Severin kept back much that he heard from

his mother, and of what she did not know Veronica was ignorant. The hospital was full to overflowing. Sickness was rife among the troops. Many wounded had been brought through, but difficulties of transport raised the question of shifting the whole medical staff wherever most needed. A time came when Dr. Severin daily expected marching orders. He had already received orders to hold himself in readiness.

During days that followed his apprehensions deepened. Not for himself but those whom he would leave alone. If only that foolish girl Veronica had fallen in love with Otto Rosen instead of Marson all would have been well, for whatever Rosen might lack as a brother-in-law, to Veronica he was certainly devoted.

But since Murad's execution matters were terribly strained. Veronica had called it murder to Rosen's face and accused him of being as bad as an accomplice. Rosen had turned upon her in fierce resentment and not been near the house since.

Sinister rumors were afloat. Native raconteurs had wonderful stories to relate, inspired no doubt by German invention. One glaring example was to the effect that England had succeeded in stealing the bones of the Prophet and it was to recover these sacred relics for Islam that Germany had gone to war with her.

"How the Germans must laugh at their dupes," said Anna Severin, relating this titbit of gossip brought fresh by Amina from a shopping expedition. "She says she is certain she saw Ali. They came suddenly face to face, but before she could speak or hold him he had slipped behind a camel blocking the way. Though muffled to the eyes she was sure it was Ali."

"He would run a great risk in speaking to her in



public. If it was Ali he will find a way of coming here," said Nicholas. "That story is simply circulated to counterbalance the effect of the bad news about the Egyptian expedition."

For in spite of banquets of rejoicing held to celebrate the success of Turkish arms, and the posters printed in letters of gold giving glowing accounts of a great victory over English arms, of the capture of Suez and Ismailia, and the sinking of British cruisers in the Canal, and all at the cost of very few lives and wounded, the news was slowly coming through even as far north as Opella that there had been a disastrous and definite defeat.

A day later the official summons anticipated by Nicholas called him away from the hospital. When he returned close upon sunset his dark face, though normally impassive like most men with a tang of the Orient in their blood, showed under the red fez a curiously anxious look.

As a rule the gateway and forecourt were beset at this hour by a crowd of sick people of the poorest description for whom the doctor daily prescribed. To-day the doorkeeper had packed all off peremptorily, declaring that nobody could be seen and nothing done till the morrow.

One man alone had proved obstinate, stealthily returning to squat by the wall every time the doorkeeper withdrew. When Nicholas put his hand to the wicket door of the big gateway this figure suddenly rose beside him. From the folds of an abbai and closely swathed keffiyeh there emerged a muffled voice.

"Mercy, el hakim, effendi! A boon!"

"What! Thou insolent dog! Thou darest still to obtrude when thrice I have bidden thee begone and

driven thee forth!" stormed the doorkeeper, suddenly appearing and fearing a reprimand.

"No matter, Selim, now I am here. It is better to send him away satisfied than that he should continue to annoy," said the doctor indifferently. Then turning to the Arab he said, "Follow me!"

While Selim grumbled angrily to himself by the gate the offender shuffled humbly across the court in the footsteps of his benefactor to a tiled hall under the arcade lined with stone benches. Nicholas turned to scrutinize his patient at close quarters.

"Well, Ali, you have come at last," he said in a low voice. "With good news or evil! Be on your guard! There are tale-bearers about."

The man stood silent for a moment looking cautiously around. "Is there an inner room?" he mumbled.

"Come!" said Nicholas briefly, with a gesture towards a door at the side of the room which opened into a dispensary connecting by a few steps and a second door with the doctor's official private room. These were screened by a wooden partition cutting off the lower end of the dispensary.

"Is that you, Nicholas?" said a woman's voice behind the screen. "I have nearly finished making up the last prescription."

The Arab started. His stooping figure covered with dust suddenly shot upright as he began to fumble with the folds of his keffiyeh. With a peremptory gesture Nicholas imposed silence and stillness upon his visitor and went for a moment out of sight.

"Leave it!" he whispered in his sister's ear. "Go at once and wait for me in my room. Quick, Veronica!"

He turned back and again faced the Arab. "It is not Ali. Who are you?" he said sternly with the suspicion of one who anticipates a snare.

The Arab glanced at the door behind, fastened it and then showed his face.

"It is I, my friend, Pierre Marson! Did I not say you would fail to recognize me next time we met?"

The revelation was a blow for Nicholas. For the moment dismay, apprehension, and his knowledge of pending difficulties made him speechless. He stared at Pierre, loath either to declare him welcome or to denounce the reckless hazard of his visit for both of them. He rejoiced that Veronica was out of hearing.

"I don't think you are best pleased to see me, doctor," said Pierre, "and but for personal reasons and intense fear for your family I would have given Opella a wide berth on this secret journey of mine. I have many disclosures to make. Is this a fitting place in which to discuss them? You must not take risks," he said with an eager intense look towards the screen.

"I have taken none," said Nicholas, shortly. "Veronica has already left by another door. It is certain that you must not stay in the hospital more than a few minutes longer. To avoid any suspicion we must go back to the hall. There I will make a pretense of examining your foot or leg, will give you an ointment and you must leave by the same way you entered, showing your remedy to the gatekeeper as you pass."

"But in heaven's name what then, Severin? I am bound to see you again, and what is more I must see Veronica," said Marson, firmly.

"Come! Muffle your head again. I will explain," said the doctor hastening to the door.

Marson gave a longing glance towards the screen before he followed. The outer room was still empty. Doctor Severin seated his pseudo-patient in full view of the entrance on one of the stone benches, and raising his foot began to speak in a low rapid voice.

"You have come at a critical hour. I have only just come back from army medical head-quarters of the district. This hospital is to be partially closed and then put in charge of native dabblers in medicine. I, myself, with my whole staff am under orders to leave for Mosul in three days."

"For what object? Did they tell you?"

"Probably to take charge of a military hospital."

"I hope so," said Marson, shortly, "but be on your utmost guard. Sinister plans are in the making. Believe nothing, and test everything before running your head into a net. Have you a friend in high quarters who will take you under his special protection?"

"For myself nothing matters. It is for my family that I am anxious."

"Naturally! It is impossible for them to remain in Opella without you."

"I have decided to send them at once to a relative's house near Antioch," said Nicholas, curtly. "They will be as safe there as anywhere till the war is ended."

"Ended! It is only just beginning, and the climax is still far ahead. Tell me how and when I can come to your house."

Nicholas explained how following the way of the wall outside the gate Marson would turn the corner sharply into a narrow lonely lane. The first small strong door was the back entrance to the doctor's private house. When dark the door would be opened to him.



A few minutes later a gratified Arab, to all appearance tottering and decrepit, passed through the gate showing his ointment with triumph to the porter, and muttering "Inshallahs" and other blessings for every curse the man called after him.

Nicholas found Veronica flushed and expectant, sitting stiff and straight in a chair and staring towards the door. She was utterly in the dark as to what had occurred, only knowing that it was something unusual to call up the peremptory tone and tense look of her brother.

He explained how an Arab had waylaid him at the gate, and that thinking it was Ali he had brought him in.

"But I soon discovered it was not Ali at all and hearing your voice I took no chance of your being mixed up in any other affair," he said.

"Then who was it?" she asked quickly, divining a mystery he meant to clear up, "but I know," she continued breathlessly, a great light bursting upon her, "it was Pierre! Where is he? Let me go to him!" she darted to the door.

He caught her by the hand pulling her to a standstill.

"He is not there. How right I was to send you away! You have too little self control. Is that the way to act when his life and freedom are at stake, and who knows how much more?" he said in a low, angered voice.

Veronica shrank back and dropped into her chair.

"You are cruel," she gasped. "You have not let him go without once letting us meet? Have you never loved with every breath of your body, and your whole heart and soul? Can't you understand what you make me suffer?"

"He is coming to the house. Be at ease! You will see him," said Nicholas, "though should the fact creep

out it will mean our doom. There, there, little sister, I know all about it. Solely on that account and no other I have taken the risk."

As he bent over to caress her she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"I am so happy," she whispered.

Nicholas was silent though his heart ached for her, and for all he had to make known to his mother before the day was finished.

Without further delay he went out of the room to complete his duties, while Veronica went home through the garden and broke the news to her mother. This time it was no question of a family meal with their guest. In secret he must enter, and in secret depart. Not even Amina must have an inkling of the Arab's identity beyond knowing he had come with an important message for her master, who must not be disturbed when they were talking together.

Amina's gaze followed the doctor and his humble caller as they passed through the kitchen courtyard into the passage leading to the house. Bitter had been her feelings against the powers that ruled in war time since Murad's death. Her loyalty to the Severin family was an ingrained habit of mind. It was merely fear of her loquacity that counseled caution on their part.

"Still a boon, O hakim most benign! Water and a clean kumis of your bounty, O gracious one!" murmured Pierre.

"Both needs were foreseen and provided for. You will find them here," said Nicholas, lifting a curtain.

"A thousand thanks! In ten minutes I shall be ready."

## CHAPTER XIV

ROSEN'S opportunity had come, the opportunity which he had impatiently anticipated. With cunning precision he had calculated that the hour of Nicholas Severin's summons to the fighting zone would render the assurance of his, Rosen's, friendly protection an indispensable solvent to the doctor's anxiety about his family.

This hour had struck. Rosen, certain of a strong position was in a fever to test its possibilities. Should he wait to be asked the desired favor? It would create a better impression on Veronica if, ignoring her recent outrageous attack on him, he came forward voluntarily with a magnanimous renewal of friendship, and a guarantee to watch zealously over their interests during the doctor's absence.

Hope beat a jubilant patter in his breast as he started to carry out his purpose that same night. Amina nearly dropped with fright as, following close upon the jingle of the gate bell, she heard the loud shout of the kawass, "Open to the Consul of Germany!"

She ran as for her life into the house and burst without ceremony into the lewan. Finding it empty she darted into the small ante-chamber at the back, then as hastily fell back. She wrung her hands. Here was a mystification she could not begin to fathom. Her young mistress sat on the divan, while by her side, his arm holding her close, as he whispered into her ear was the master's visitor, the Arab! What ought she to do?

"Amina! What are you doing there? Come here," called Mme. Severin, appearing at an opposite door of the lewan. "Stay where you are, Zia! You are not to come out."

"But yes, Mémé, I want to see Uncle John. I know it is Uncle John. I must come, I must," called the child, still out of sight and, evidently from her voice, in a state of high nervous tension.

"Hst, Amina! What is it?" asked her mistress anxiously.

"The German Consul knocks at the gate. Am I to open?"

"In the name of heaven, no! Wait till I come to you and don't let Zia come out of this room," said Mme. Severin, hurrying to the ante-chamber.

"Veronica! Rosen is at the gate. Pierre must go at once," she said in a low voice.

Veronica rose suddenly in strong agitation. For an instant she put her hand over her eyes, reflecting rapidly. Then she lifted her head, outwardly collected, though her blue eyes were black with the intensity of her feelings.

"Receive him as usual. I will take Pierre to the gate by which he entered. Make any excuse you like for me. I cannot possibly appear to-night."

"Be cautious, chérie! God guide you, God protect you on your difficult road, my son," said Mme. Severin, holding out her hand, over which Pierre bowed, kissing it.

"Quick! This way," said Veronica, burning with fear for her lover.

As the two figures disappeared into a side passage Nicholas Severin hurried into the lewan. He had been holding watch on the veranda and had heard the bell and loud, continued knocking.



"It is all right. He has gone," said his mother, approaching and speaking in a whisper. Then aloud she called, "Amina, you can open the gate. Beg the consul's pardon for keeping him waiting, but mind not a word of what you have seen."

"Allah forbid! Am I mejnoun?" retorted Amina warmly.

For once Rosen waited for admittance with neither impatience nor suspicion. On the contrary he reflected indulgently that the household wheels might well be slack on this day of disconcerting news for the family. He could picture the dismay of the mother, the anxiety of the doctor, and Veronica's disquietude and sympathy.

But all this unrest would be calmed by the faithful, reliable friend who had come to restore confidence to their shaken outlook. He was very pleased with himself and his errand. In fact he felt gay and almost buoyant as he entered the lewan with a smiling face.

"You find us discomposed, Otto, my friend, as no doubt you can well imagine. This sudden departure of Nicholas is very unsettling," said Mme. Severin, speaking rapidly. "A thousand regrets you were kept waiting. As you know we have been unable to get anybody yet in Murad's place and Amina cannot always be on the spot to open the gate promptly."

At once she was conscious that the utterance of Murad's name was a wrong note. As Rosen's face stiffened she could have bitten her tongue out for the slip.

"It was nothing! Nothing at all, dear Madame," he said, making special effort to speak affably though tactlessly reminded of Veronica's severity. And where was

she, by the by, his look inquired, traveling quickly round the room.

"Yes, we have much to arrange before I leave," the doctor said gravely, unconsciously giving Rosen the desired lead.

"That is the reason I am here to-night. What can I do for you in your absence? Command me in any way and I will do my utmost."

"I know he is there. Uncle John! Uncle John!" cried Zia, bursting into the lewan. Left alone for the moment because feigning sleep she had slipped nimbly out of bed and now stood before them a little figure in white, her curls falling over her face. She caught sight of Rosen and at once stood stockstill, staring at him.

"You! You! I don't want you," she said, pointing a disdainful finger. "I want my Uncle John. Where is he? Why doesn't he come to me?"

"Go back to bed this instant, Zia," said her father, sternly. "Your Uncle John has not been in the house for over three months."

"Then who was it?" she said, obstinately. "I want to see him and ask why my Uncle John does not come and see me."

Mme. Severin summarily caught her up and carried her crying and protesting away from the lewan.

"Zia was much attached to her uncle," said Nicholas, shutting the door and producing a box of cigars, "and is always expecting to see him. Had I foreseen the impression it would make on her mind to hide the truth I would have disclosed it at the beginning. I feared the effect on her health."

"Then you mean to say she does not know he was either interned or that he escaped?" asked Rosen with a

mocking smile, for he had no belief in what he considered an excuse.

Then he sat silent, immersed in thought though apparently listening to Nicholas. Mechanically he accepted a cigar, set light to it and smoked steadily.

Detached phrases were forcing themselves to the front of his mind. "He was here just now," and "then who was it?" There had been somebody there whose identity was not revealed to Zia. She had not been allowed to see him. If not the Englishman, who was it? Another Armenian relative? And where was Veronica? It was not possible she was still sulking.

At that moment Veronica stood still and rigid, listening with every nerve alert, just inside the low strong door in the wall she had closed upon Pierre.

"Courage, bien-aimée!" he had whispered. This had been his last word when she had clung to him desperately at the last. "Courage!" It should be her watchword from now on to the end.

What would be that end? She quivered from head to foot, still listening, overpowered by a sense of unspeakable loneliness and despair. Hark! Was that a cry in the lane, or merely a call from the town beyond?

With a mighty effort she dragged herself back to reality and slowly crossed the flags of the little foliage overhung quadrangle. She found her mother seated in the kitchen with Zia in her arms.

"What is it?" she exclaimed, fearing something sinister.

Zia herself gasped out the reply, brokenly, self-accusingly.

Veronica stood dumbfounded, her already overstrained senses unable at first to take in the meaning of what

had happened. Then of a sudden all that was latent in her of the hot passionate Orient boiled up in anger. With a gleam in the blue of her eyes as of flame she made a swift step forward.

"Veronica!" called her mother imperatively.

The girl's out-stretched hands clenched and dropped to her side. "You little traitor!" she said in a low tense voice, then walked quickly away.

One idea suddenly developed and filled her mind. How to disarm suspicion from endangering Pierre's chance of getting safely out of the town. There was nothing for it but to batten down the anguish of her heart and act a part for Otto Rosen's benefit.

Hastily she ran to her room, splashed water over her face and rubbed it hard to bring color to her cheeks. Then with a fresh ribbon in her hair and a bunch of roses in her belt she went unhesitatingly to make her peace with Rosen. For their last encounter had been one of storm and recrimination.

Nicholas gave her a keen look as she entered. Was she equal to the task that he instantly divined she was undertaking? But Veronica smiling and beautiful with a warmth in her voice that had failed for months was irresistible. The stubborn monosyllables which had marked Rosen's replies to the doctor expanded into a gracious enquiry.

"Thank you, my head ached badly. I had to rest for a while, but when Amina told me you were here I made a special effort," she said, curling herself into a corner of the divan as if still fatigued. "You see we are all worried about losing Nicholas, and you can tell us all kinds of things we want to know. You are always better informed than all the bulletins."



"In every way I am at your service, Veronica," he said in his formal way, then with added warmth, "but tell me first, are you sure you are better?"

"Am not I here? That speaks for itself," she said, smiling. "And if you will only give me one of your very own cigarettes my head will soon be quite cured. You remember my weakness for them."

Rosen's face was instantly radiant. Producing his case with alacrity he moved to a seat close to the divan. When Veronica, recklessly encouraging him, leaned forward that he might set light to the cigarette from a match in his hollowed hand the blood surged to his face. With her lapse into the old familiarity his whole being leaped alive. Months had gone by since she had made a similar request. Their eyes met. He fancied he could read remorse in the kindly look she gave him.

Nicholas Severin took advantage of Rosen's absorption to slip out of the room. He could delay no longer in giving Zia a sedative, and it was imperative to have a grave consultation with his mother. He groaned inwardly, thinking how easily his worst apprehensions would disappear had Veronica been able to respond in any shape to the passion of this man. He cursed the day that flung Marson across their path. Without him all would have been well.

For the ultimate victory of German arms was a foregone conclusion of all Opella. Turkey was involved up to the hilt in every aim that moved and inspired the Central Powers. One result alone was possible in spite of local set-backs. The complete defeat of England and France, unless of course Russia surpassed all and every expectation. She was already vigorously pressing the Caucasian campaign. They were close upon Armenia.

Armenia! That was the word engraved on Nicholas Severin's heart. For or against, would be his people's weighty problem. On their decision would rest the fate, perhaps the doom, of the whole race.

Noiseless though the doctor's exit, Rosen heard the movement and turned sharply round. A look as of a trapped animal came into Veronica's eyes, but it flashed in and out of them in an instant. She had to play a skillful game with Pierre's safety for stakes. The courage invoked by her lover should not fail; but he had little thought how soon it would be put to the test, or in what distasteful and intolerable fashion.

"The very thing," said Rosen, confidentially, "for before I talk finally with Nicholas on matters connected with his absence you and I have something to say to each other."

"What is it?" asked Veronica, bent on braving the worst.

"It is perfectly true that I am better informed than the bulletins, and most fortunate it is for all concerned," he leaned forward in his chair, lowering his voice. "I have something here to show you," he tapped his chest, "which has given me great disquietude on your account. It will not be made generally known for a week or more."

"My account?" she queried.

"And your family," he added, hastily.

"What is it?"

"In the light of what is bound to come sooner or later there seems only one way of evading all chances of danger."

"Danger? What kind of danger? To us at home or to Nicholas?"

"It may not be danger at all, but only serious inconvenience. It all depends, but keep calm, I beg of you, dear Veronica. You have no cause to worry personally. My friends shall go scot free of all likelihood of trouble. That is to say," he paused weightily, "if they allow me the power to act."

"Speak plainly," she said, "or how on earth can I understand what you mean."

"First give me your word that what I disclose in secret you will hold solemnly secret," he said, impressively.

"I promise," she said, perplexed, "but I warn you it would be wiser to make Nicholas your confidant."

"No!" he said shortly, drawing a leather case from an inside pocket, turning over some papers and extracting one. "Read that!"

She took the paper with a smile that withered on her lips as she began to read.

"It is impossible to see here," she exclaimed, rising suddenly and crossing to a table underneath the hanging lamp. She sat down to hide the trembling of her hand, flattened the paper on the table before her and read on steadily. It was a typewritten copy of an official declaration about to be scattered broadcast for the edification of neutral nations.

"Inasmuch as the Armenians are committing acts opposed to the laws and taking advantage of all occasions to disturb the Government; as they have been found in possession of prohibited arms, bombs, and explosive materials, prepared with the object of internal revolt; as they have killed Moslems in Van and have aided the Russian armies at a time when the Government is in a state of war with England, France and Russia; and in

the apprehension that the Armenians may, as is their habit, lend themselves to seditious tumult and revolt; the Government have decreed that all the Armenians shall be collected and dispatched to the vilayets of Mosul, Syria, and Deir-el-Zur, their persons, goods and honor being safeguarded. The necessary orders have been given for ensuring their comfort, and for their residence in those territories until the termination of the war."

He watched her narrowly, a fact of which she was conscious, as she strove to keep the succeeding emotions of anger, indignation and fear from appearing in her face. The blow so often dreaded and discussed in anticipation had been prepared and was about to fall.

"Well?" she questioned, deliberately. "Well? Can you hand me a statement like this without expressing your own detestation of such a monstrous crime?"

He moved hastily to her side. This was a point of view he had not foreseen. With his usual obtuseness he had calculated upon an appealing display of feminine weakness.

"Crime? Why it is a most reasonable and tolerant decree," he expostulated. "Of course it is always melancholy that such precautions touch the innocent as well as the guilty; but note how every one's comfort is to be ensured, and their stay in the prescribed districts made as easy as possible."

Veronica's eyes kindled, regarding him steadily as he spoke.

"What are such promises worth, Herr Rosen? Nothing at all, and you know it as well as I do," she said, vehemently. "Take your paper! It is a terrible statement. I repeat it is Nicholas who should have been your confidant."



"But it is you above all others I want to shield from difficulties."

"By trying to scare me? Is that how your women in Germany like to be treated? Do you really think I would seize any advantage that my family could not share?"

"Exactly what I foresaw. The whole matter lies in your hands. I have planned everything," he said, eagerly. "You have only to consent to our marriage before Nicholas leaves and all can be easily managed. The step has been contemplated so long. Let us take it immediately."

Veronica's blood froze under his words. She kept her eyes lowered, her gaze averted, lest he should read in them too readily the horror congealing her heart.

"This is the urgent reason for my visit here to-night," he went on. "I want Nicholas to be assured before he leaves that you are all in absolute safety and comfort. For of course Mme. Severin and Zia will move over to the Consulate. There will be room for us all."

"Impossible!" shot from Veronica's lips.

"No, no! Nothing is impossible, above all this most splendid dream of seeing you my wife," he cried, catching her hand and pressing it between his own hands, not daring a closer caress. "Be persuaded, my beautiful sweetheart! Have no fear! Your Otto will prove the most loving and indulgent husband."

This time there was no responsive smile on her lips. She could listen no longer. With a jerking movement she got up.

"I cannot be rushed like this," she said, her voice palpably shaking. "Weddings are out of place in war time. I cannot even contemplate the idea of marriage

just now. We must all take our chance and trust in God."

He stood silent with quickly changed expression, his eyes staring moodily at her. Perhaps after all he had made a mistake not to speak first to Nicholas. United persuasion would have had stronger effect. A new idea sprang to his mind. He took up the paper.

"At any rate you know what is coming. You are warned," he said with gravity, replacing the decree in his letter case. "I can do no more."

"But you will show it to Nicholas and Mother," she said with a new flush of alarm.

"O dear, no! As you refuse to meet the crisis in the only way possible to relieve your brother's mind and be of service to your mother I shall not dream of needlessly rousing their anxiety in advance."

"But you must," she returned earnestly. "It is your duty as a friend."

He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in response. A queer light came into his eyes.

Veronica breathed hard. She turned right and left, started for the door, came back and again confronted him.

"Wait!" she gasped. "Wait till to-morrow. I must think first. It is all so difficult."

There was triumph in the look he gave her. The goal for which he was ever striving seemed very near.

"Very well! To-morrow I will come again. It will be the last time, Veronica. Remember your word is pledged. Not a word of this," he tapped his breast, "till you see me again."

Without waiting to see the effect of his words he went off.

## CHAPTER XV

THE danger for Pierre Marson and their own complicity in his hurried escape had been staved off. This was the sum total of their relief of mind when Mme. Severin and Nicholas found that Rosen had left without waiting to see them again. All was well as he meant to return without fail the following day.

That Veronica could do more than temporize with him was out of the question now she was irretrievably bound to another man. That she was overcome to the point of collapse was also intelligible after the dual strain of farewell to her lover, and at once coping bravely with a critical situation.

So Rosen and his visit were dismissed to give place to discussion of plans for the family. It was settled that preparations for shutting up the house should be hurried on, and as soon as complete the family would set out for the village where their relative Kasbarian was pastor to a community of Armenians.

Veronica, pondering over this step in the light of the ominous declaration, imagined that such a removal would obviate in their case any official enforcement of the dispatch. If so her silence on the subject constituted no menace to her loved ones.

Next day came and passed. Rosen did not appear at the house. Perhaps he meant to push Veronica so closely for time that further procrastination would be impossible. Trapped into so narrow a corner surrender would be inevitable.

Doctor Severin's day of departure came. He was distinctly worried. "What can I do for you?" Rosen had said amiably. "Command me and I will do my utmost;" but he had neither waited to receive his friend's instructions nor come again as promised.

Veronica was both relieved and alarmed. Relieved that the definite refusal was again postponed. Alarmed because it looked as if Rosen was waiting to gain some fancied advantage which their position without Nicholas might yield to him.

Though pressed for time Nicholas took the decisive step of calling at the German Consulate.

"You have been long," said his mother on his return, grudging every moment he was out of her sight.

"It was unavoidable. I had to wait and even then Rosen would not see me."

"Not see you?"

"Strange, isn't it? I cannot fathom his game. I waited thinking there was some mistake, and sent in another message. The first time I was told the Consul was engaged. The second reply was a distinct refusal to receive me, though veiled in palaver by the clerk. Impossible to see me, however urgent my business."

"It can have nothing to do with me," put in Veronica, anxiously. "He must have some other hidden motive."

"I at once went to see Mr. Luce the American Consul," continued Nicholas. "Like the good fellow he is he has promised to help you in any unforeseen difficulty. You are to let him know whenever he can be of the least service. Should he hear of any one going by your route he will let you know so that you might travel together."

"Then we can dispense with the favors of Herr Otto Rosen," said Anna Severin.



"Thank heaven! Thank heaven!" cried Veronica.

"All the same I am dissatisfied," said Nicholas, uneasily.

"I trust the fellow has nothing disagreeable up his sleeve."

"No fear! He simply nurses the delusion that a show of independence and temper will melt Vronka," said Mme. Severin.

Veronica was perplexed. Did Rosen's failure to make good his own promise, and his curious refusal to see Nicholas, cancel the secrecy imposed upon her!

"There is something else," she said, deciding quickly her course. "He pledged me to silence, but his present behavior makes the matter too serious to hide."

Her hesitation and doubt once thrown aside she gave a lucid account of her latest duel with Rosen, how he had thrust and she had parried till at last he had held her at his mercy on account of his refusal to show the document to Nicholas.

"I was sure you had something else on your mind, chérie," said her mother, tenderly.

Nicholas paid close attention to the story, weighing all carefully with a contemptuous judgment of the man and his tactics.

"In any case I should have been compelled to enlist the good offices of Mr. Luce," he said.

"But the declaration, Nicholas, that is the important matter to consider."

"It seems to me a mere bogey to coerce Veronica. She says it was only type-written. If it really existed some inkling would have trickled through to me. I am perfectly easy on that score."

All too soon Nicholas had gone. Somewhere out in the

blue; that was all they knew, for Mosul after all was only a doubtful goal. The British were worming up the Euphrates from Basra; the Russians were in the Caucasus. Turkish troops were pouring towards both fronts. The medical unit to which he was attached might be bound for either. Letters? Who could tell? The field postal service of the Turkish army needed searching reorganization for them to become any but an uncertain and rare quantity. This in spite of the fevered reforms carried by their German over-lords into every branch of military activity.

Veronica's home anxieties obscured in part the grief and suspense about Pierre which pursued her day and night. If only the implacable silence could be broken was the wish that stabbed her unceasingly to the heart. But her mother, outwardly courageous to the last look of her son, utterly broke down when he was out of her sight and was prostrate for days.

"I depend upon you, Veronica," Nicholas said impressively. "It is my one consolation to feel that you will be eyes and ears for our mother, and cherish my little Zia as if she were your own."

But Zia, miserable without her father, was not easily comforted and exceedingly captious. Veronica's anger still rankled in the child's memory. It was to her grandmother she clung in these days rather than to Aunt Vronka. Mme. Severin responding to the greater pull at her heart strings was called back the sooner to a state of resignation.

"Hélas, it is destiny," she declared. "Nothing we can do of ourselves can possibly change what is already ordained."

Rosen still gave no sign of life, but his silence ceased

to give concern. Other friends came in and out more frequently to sympathize and offer to help in the absence of Nicholas. Tales of the war, of fabulous victories under Turkish and German command colored all the gossip that drifted in.

Certain of the doctor's gratis patients, chased from the hospital under the new régime, found their way to the back gate of the house. For these Veronica did what she could, but remedies were no longer abundant. The little chest of medicine prepared for her by Nicholas he had charged her to use sparingly. None could be easily renewed.

"Impossible to treat them all as he did. We should never get done," said Mme. Severin. "The Arab patient is a sponge that would sop up the sea."

One day the ragged importunate crowd ceased to collect and did not again appear. Amina brought in word that two soldiers at the end of the lane allowed no one to pass. All kinds of new regulations being now enforced on the town, those who professed to be in the know predicted that martial law might set in at any moment.

The military had taken over the railway. Movements of travelers were controlled by passports or special permits. All the exasperating restrictions with which the late Sultan had fettered his subjects, especially the Christians, had come back. Armenians, for instance, could no longer travel where they pleased without very special attention to their identification certificates.

The diligence for the coast ran irregularly these days. It was always crowded and not very safe owing to the raiding bands of deserters who had turned brigand.

Folk who were lucky traveled in parties, preferably at the same time as the mail, which was protected by an armed guard. Big backsheesh was exacted for this privilege.

Mme. Severin was prepared to pay, and soon all was ready for the journey. That is to say all but the passport, about which there was undue delay. Yet others had been made to wait. There was no doubt the official heads whose signatures were essential had never been so hard worked in their lives.

The almond trees were in blossom when Nicholas Severin went away. Two weeks later the land around Opella was fragrant with flowering herbs. These the countrywomen collected in great flat baskets and brought for sale into the town on their heads or spread out with vegetables on the backs of the asses. For the ordinary Syrian is never so happy as when he is fingering a nosegay, or sporting a flower, or inhaling the odor of bruised petals and leaves strewn pell mell over his terraces.

Veronica, who had come out on a last hurried shopping expedition, stood selecting while Amina bargained with one of these women who had squatted with her burden alongside a wall on their route.

Oh, the bitter-sweetness of this appeal of spring beauty!

Something rebellious rose and beat fiercely in Veronica's throat. Why was she made to suffer so cruelly when others lived happily and never knew what it meant to live in hourly apprehension for the fate of the being loved beyond everything upon earth. As if to press back and stifle the heart-ache magnified by the mingled scents and colors she crushed up against her bosom a big



armful of anemones, white and lilac, crimson and blue, while she packed into Amina's basket bunch upon bunch of strangely pungent herbs.

Out of the passers-by a little crowd quickly closed round taking the usual lively interest and share in the transaction. Veronica unused to the veil which her mother insisted upon her wearing these days, had momentarily thrust it aside. Her face, paler and stiller than ordinary, with repression straightening her lips, was grave, almost severe, in profile.

She was still bending when she felt a decided pull at her mantle, and a low voice whispered in her ear: "Danger! The hunters are out. Take this and go home! Read it alone!"

Instinctively she lowered her hand without looking round. Nothing caused her surprise in the maze of unrealities which had sprung up in her life. In a moment a folded paper cautiously thrust into her hand was secreted. She dared not look up but still fumbled among the flowers while Amina's tongue ran on noisily claiming general attention.

But Veronica's heart was beating tempestuously. She had received her cue. Who was the messenger? Some one intimate and beloved, or another acting on his behalf, or was it a friend of Nicholas, or one of the many to whom he had been a benefactor?

"Come Amina, though time is short you know we are obliged to pass by the chemist on our way home," she said in a clear voice meant to be heard by another ear. With a quick movement she turned sharply round, and as she moved away her eyes cast a casual yet sweeping glance over those who stood near.

"Allah! It is even more necessary to call at the

pastry cook's, or our little swallow will die for lack of the right food to nourish her," cried Amina.

"Hurry then! We can go home through the market place." This was a shorter cut to their own quarter than the way they had come.

The group of two Moslem women, a beggar or two, a negro sherbet-seller, a dark-robed Jew with side locks dangling under his round fur cap, a Circassian striding away, a few children, threw no light on the identity of the mysterious speaker.

Disturbed with frantic surmise and by a tumult of chasing emotions, Veronica failed to notice, as she walked away, the behavior of the flower seller.

"May Satan strangle you and all like you," muttered the woman ferociously, in return for which pleasantry Amina turned with flaming eyes and spat angrily on the ground before her.

Never had the souks seemed fuller of vivid and varied life. Every one was hurrying. The buzz of tongues seemed on a higher key than ordinary. Some under-current of excitement was working like quicksilver through the blue twilight of the covered streets.

Veronica's nerves quivered to the unseen influence. All kinds of distressful questions streamed through her mind.

"What is it?" she asked herself. "What is it?"

Contrary to custom the shopkeepers in no way pressed their goods upon her, and what was stranger still omitted their usual salutation. What was in the air? Who could have warned her?

Directly Amina had bought what was necessary to whet Zia's dainty appetite Veronica hurried her on. But the narrow street into which they turned to reach

the market place was suddenly invaded by a press of people pouring excitedly through it from several directions. The girl and her maid were drawn into the human torrent. But for certain remarks tossed about in the crowd the nature of the mood which possessed the people might have been that of a gala day.

"They will be treated the same!"

"Who can deny that the justice of Allah has come?"

"God's curse on all unbelievers! They reap only what they have sown."

Veronica felt that something sinister was afloat. Pressed onward by the surging crowds they suddenly came out on the market place. Here the people were able to spread out and then swarm to a standstill. But the shrill frenzy of chatter in no way abated.

Here an involuntary cry escaped from Veronica. Her eyes stared forward with petrified fixity of gaze. She gripped Amina by the arm motioning dumbly to another crowd of human beings massed in the center of the great open space, a crowd of an entirely different character from that to which the two women unwillingly belonged.

"What can it mean? Who are they?" she exclaimed.

A cordon of Turkish soldiers were herding this other crowd into the middle of the market place. Many of them were still trudging painfully forward in slow procession from the high road which lay beyond the town on the further side.

Women, young and old, children of all ages, young boys and aged men, all wan, emaciated, hollow-eyed, covered with dust and sweat were huddled together on the ground, or standing close packed like cattle with down cast heads and bowed shoulders. Those approach-

ing were like sleep walkers who appeared to see, neither hear anything at all. Like the Gibeonites of old their garments were ragged, and filthy, and few, as if by reason of a very long journey. Those who had no remnants of shoes or sandals clouted with rags upon their feet walked bare-footed and bleeding.

All had the aspect of people sorely hurt and mentally dazed, who had barely escaped with their lives from some great catastrophe of earthquake, fire or famine. Here were heads and eyes bandaged, there arms and legs wound round with blood dyed rags. Many seemed in a fainting condition. One and the other tottered and dropped to their knees, only to be brought staggering to their feet by the prod of a rifle butt end or soldier's bayonet. Little children whimpered continuously, too exhausted to raise a cry. They opened their mouths incessantly like starving birds or like fish dying on dry land.

"Who are they? What does it mean?" repeated Veronica, automatically, her own mouth and lips parched by the horror and distress which contracted her throat.

"Come away! Come away! We must go home," said Amina, agitatedly, seizing her by the arm. She had been listening to the talk going on around while Veronica, stupefied, stared with increasing horror at the tragic throng.

"No, they suffer, they are hungry. They must be succored," she replied. "We must do something for them, seek water and food for them."

The cruel condition of these people who looked like hard-pressed, wounded fugitives fresh from all the tortures of an invaded war zone, filled her with the one idea



of administering to their needs. It was a scene impossible to understand without enlightenment. That it augured disaster for themselves she did not divine.

Loud commanding shouts penetrated the shrill hubbub of voices resounding on all sides.

“Dahrak! Out of the way O less than dust! His Excellency is here! Dahrak! Clear a way! Dahrak!”

Veronica and Amina clinging closely together were hemmed in anew by waves of movement in the crowd. By magic a passage was cleared, along which rode Ahmed Pasha and a German officer with a small mounted escort.

“Draw your veil, little sister,” whispered a low voice in Veronica’s ear.

She obeyed, rapidly realizing with a start of dismay and pang of fear the fatal remissness that had singled her out ever since the purchase of the flowers, and which had possibly accounted for the remote attitude of the bazaar shopkeepers, who are always in touch with the public mood of the hour.

Right and left the German officer’s small mocking eyes played incessantly over the crowd near him, appraising, searching out and classifying. Soldiers, more soldiers, and still more, they appeared to demand. For an instant Veronica had an uneasy impression that the metallic glance rested momentarily on herself and Amina, but soon saw that it concerned the man standing at her shoulder, some one of whose identity she was passionately curious. For it was certain that he alone could have spoken to her.

Apparently he was a Circassian wrapped about in the usual black cloak. All that was visible of his face under the white woolen hood covering his astrakhan cap was

bronzed almost to blackness. But though he seemed strong and wiry in build his shoulders were bowed and his beard grizzled, so the German's glance darted wider afield to spy out younger men at this priceless opportunity for searching them out.

As the riders passed and the people who had formed the lane closed up behind them Veronica was again jostled to and fro, though preserved from stumbling by a firm clutch on her arm.

The pasha riding slowly round the cordon in the center began to interview the soldiers in charge. His clean-cut thin face was grim and set. He spoke with a commanding voice.

"If I hear one man I must hear all and both sides," he called out. "Get back that I may give ear to the complaints in turn."

Just then the Circassian, whose eyes dark and luminous under their hooded shelter kept unceasing watch on the surrounding people, saw that every neck was suddenly craned to investigate a new agitation on the edge of the crowd nearest the bazaars. At once he bent his head low over Veronica and spoke into her ear in a muffled voice.

"This pasha is at least human, but the stone has been set rolling. He cannot stop it."

"Ah! It is—" gasped Veronica, only checking her tongue in time from uttering the name of "John" aloud.

"Hush!"

"Not a soul listens," she said under her breath. "See, they are all watching something over there."

"It is enough if only one were to see us talking together. Read the note later. It is important."

John Culver, so skillfully disguised as to defy recogni-

tion unless he chose to give a clew to his real identity, was keenly watching an opportunity to extricate Veronica from her dangerous position. Fierce cries rose from behind. Again the press swayed and was forced asunder by a number of men laden with all kinds of household furniture.

"Now is the moment," whispered John of a sudden. "Come on, close behind me!"

Panting, half choked the two women struggled on step by step behind the thrusting elbows of the figure pushing on in front. All around them surged the crowd, shouting and jostling. A few interminable minutes of slow progress and then on the edge of the square opened out close at hand a comparatively empty street.

"That way! Go slowly," said John as he turned suddenly to one side to let them pass and then himself disappearing instantly.

"Allah! Allah!" babbled Amina as she shuffled down the street by Veronica's side. They came to a broad cross street which swarmed right and left with another rabble, struggling shapes which seemed storming the shops and stalls and throwing the contents into the open thoroughfare, and others lading themselves with booty of every description. All were too eagerly absorbed to take any notice of the two women hung up on their way by the horror of the ominous spectacle.

For they were all Christian shops, and chiefly Armenian; wealthy shops filled with the richest commodities, jewelry, and glittering silks, and eastern luxuries of many kinds. A Moslem more audacious than the rest had suddenly pounced upon a valuable article and exhibited his prize triumphantly. It was a signal to grasp and whirl away whatever took their fancy. The shop-

keepers fled in fear of their lives, though murder had not yet mingled in the unbridled game of pillage.

Veronica breathed hard. Her first thought leaped to her mother. Pictures of a dreadful past edged round by lines of fire flitted through her brain as she walked swiftly, continually urging Amina to hasten her steps. The way they trod was quiet and luckily unfrequented just then. They passed the Turkish Post Office. Twenty yards further the street widened into a small open area where stood several official buildings, and among them the double gates and strong outer wall of the German Consulate.

With an added shudder Veronica hurried by on the other side. Those iron bars seemed to her agitated mind a trap that might open on the instant to snatch her within. Hardly had she passed than a covered carriage drove quickly by and drew up at a big gate further on where Turkish sentries were posted.

Suddenly Amina gave a loud exclamation, turned round and stood stock still, refusing to budge.

"Look, look!" she said in a scared voice, pulling Veronica back with vigor. "The little Zia in that carriage. It was Zia and none other."

"You are mad, you see dreams," retorted Veronica sternly. "Come on this minute! The least delay may mean harm to both Zia and mother."

Muttering protests and half weeping the woman followed obediently after giving another backward glance at the carriage which was already moving away from the gate.

When they reached the house five minutes later it was to find an atmosphere of distress and confusion. Mme. Severin, absorbed in duties entailed by her early de-



parture, had relaxed her watch over Zia's movements. Missing her she called out within doors, and then from the veranda, but Zia was not to be found anywhere and the garden gate was wide open.

Never once had she been known to venture alone into the street, her lameness causing a certain timidity. Veronica turned to Amina, voiceless with a new dread.

"Why has Allah given us eyes to see when he points the way? You would not listen," cried the woman roughly, distracted with fear for her idol after all she had just seen and gone through. "By myself I will go and snatch her from the trap, whatever it is. Inshallah, I shall not return without her."

She rushed away but came back in quarter of an hour before Veronica, preoccupied in calming her mother, had been able to disclose the tragic picture of the market place, or the history of the pillage of Christian shops.

"If they kill me for it I care nothing at all, but give me at once of the magic powder which shuts the eye quickly in sleep, and it must be strong," said Amina grimly. "I have not seen her yet, but she is there and calls aloud with tears. By the soul of my mother I shall soon carry her back to her home. Be ready, O Sitt, to set out on your journey before they follow and snatch her again from our arms."

## CHAPTER XVI

A MINA returned to the house where the carriage had stopped. That sentries were at the gate was no hindrance to her entry, for at all hours of the day a miscellaneous number of people were allowed to stroll aimlessly in and out of the courtyard. With the air of one bent on a definite errand she crossed to the small room of the coffee hearth presided over by a woman of her own village with whom she was on intimate terms.

On her first entrance, wary of plunging into the subject vital to her visit, she had fished for information with all the skillful cunning of her race. Quickly she had got in touch with the incident which was exciting curiosity, and among the women of the household no small indignation.

A little girl, daughter of the good clever doctor who had cured so many maladies in the harem of this official of the Turkish Police, had been brought in and conveyed to an ante-chamber removed from the audience hall. She had been heard to call out long and plaintively.

"In the name of Allah what does it mean, my sister?" whispered the old woman.

"It is the work of a devil who hates all angels and tries to destroy them," hissed Amina. "Have you seen her?"

"Just a glimpse as she passed in. 'Greeting to you, O Saida,' she said, shaking her yellow hair over her shoulder. The German effendi close behind hurried her on as if he wanted no one to see her."

"The little delicate one with the heart of a lion has dared to defy him more than once. He wants to punish her without a doubt," said Amina, her black eyes darting right and left and out into the hall curiously deserted to-day of its ordinary visitors owing to attractions elsewhere of greater magnitude. All her native ingenuity of intrigue had started furiously to work. Five minutes talk revealed that her friend was itching to go into the town to investigate with her own eyes the truth of the exciting reports brought from outside.

"I have seen, I know!" exclaimed Amina with animated suggestion of unprecedented happenings. "Go and see for yourself while I boil coffee in your absence. But wait," she added with an illuminating thought flashed by Allah himself into her mind she later declared, "first I must run home to fulfill the errand which brought me out. In the twinkling of an eye I will return."

And now Amina, outwardly stolid and composed, crouched in solitary charge of the coffee hearth. Her ear was strained to catch every sound, while her eyes were on the watch for the least movement of the revolving cupboard in the wall which communicated with the servants of the Selamlık.

"O Saida, mother of coffee, hurry up! Would you make His Excellency wait?" at last came the summons for which she had made ready.

With a steady hand she poured out the coffee, put the tray into the hutch and watched it slowly disappear from view. The pewter coffee jug she carefully emptied and at once put a fresh lot on to brew. Then she dropped into a listening pose, but only for a few moments before she stepped to the doorway and looked out cautiously.

Suddenly she went out and walked quickly through the hall where two or three turbaned old men meditatively fingering their beads looked after her listlessly. The passage of a menial more or less, doubtless a slave, was not a matter to excite interest or curiosity.

Amina turned into a corridor at the end of the hall, staying her steps deferentially near a portière where a man servant was on guard.

"This is the hour I was ordered to come and fetch the child," she said, meekly. "From the hanoum Effendi herself I have taken my orders."

Doubt glimmered in the glance thrown her by the man as he bent forward to listen before the portière, but the sounds to which he had listened with callous indifference for the last half hour had subsided. Truth might lie after all in this woman's words. He raised the portière and looked into the room.

"They sleep!" he exclaimed in a surprised whisper, adding with emphasis, "and must not be disturbed."

"Bismallah! I am bound to carry off the child. Such are my orders," was the firm reply, and before a protest could be raised Amina had slipped behind the curtain.

With prompt grip of the situation she acted unhesitatingly. Her little love, her ewe-lamb, lying bunched up on the divan in the strained attitude of an injured dog, stared at her with the eyes of one beholding an impossible vision. Otto Rosen, lounging to one side of her, was sound asleep and breathing heavily, his head awkwardly propped against the wall. The Turkish official on her other side also slept with a little intermittent snore, his head buried on his breast, his fingers still slackly holding a half fallen chibouk.



Finger on lip Amina stole to the divan snatching on her way at a dust cloak, evidently Rosen's, flung over a chair. With this in a moment she had enveloped Zia from head to foot cautioning her in a whisper to be perfectly silent, and then carried her away in her strong arms. The decision of her action, and fear of the hanoum's anger should her orders be thwarted were the magic which paralyzed any opposition on the servant's part.

But Amina herself, who had weighed her chances without fear, only felt she had succeeded in her daring when, without being called back in the court, or arrested in her flight through the street, she had gained the haven of home.

At the gate stood Mme. Severin and Veronica both in walking garb, having decided to appeal for help to the American Consul if Amina failed to appear. The kidnaping of Zia had precipitated a crisis. In addition John Culver's letter spoke of pressing danger, intelligible enough in the light of the tumult prevailing in the town. He urged them to get to the orchard that very day, and after dark a boat would come and convey them to a place of hiding. All the same a safe conduct was essential in case of emergency. For this Herr Rosen might be asked to busy himself without in any way revealing their plans to him.

At any other time John's sudden reappearance under disguise, and his revelations would have been startling enough, but everything paled in significance by the side of Zia's extremity.

"If it comes to the worst I will ask Mr. Luce to come with me to Ahmed Pasha himself, and demand that the family of a medical officer on active service be protected

both in their home and traveling," said Anna Severin, vehemently.

"You must certainly go to him. He behaved well to Nicholas about poor Murad," said Veronica, who in a fever of wrathful unrest kept running into the road to watch for the first glimpse of Amina.

"Here she comes," she called at last, starting swiftly to meet the hurrying figure.

"No, no! Enter and fasten the gate! I alone will take her in," gasped the woman, refusing to halt until, safely indoors, she could place her precious burden carefully on a couch.

"Oh, dear Mother of God!" cried Mme. Severin at sight of the waxen little face pressed back on the cushions with a tense appearance of great suffering. "A cordial with brandy in it at once, Veronica."

"She is already dead, she is dead!" wailed Amina.

"She has only fainted. Keep calm, Amina. After being so brave you must not give way now—but what is this?" exclaimed Mme. Severin in horrified tones. "Oh, the devils, the devils! They have been torturing this little saint."

"Where? What is it?" asked Veronica, breathlessly, coming to her side with glass and spoon. "Hold up her head and I will feed her."

"Give it to me! Bring olive oil and soft lint at once. Her little hand is cruelly burnt," said Mme. Severin in a strangled voice. "Yes, pretty one," she said with passionate tenderness as Zia's eyelids flickered and then opened, "you are at home quite safe with Mémé and Dadi. Swallow that, little darling! You will soon be better."

The child, big-eyed and wan, stared mutely from one

face to the other as she obediently gulped down a few spoonfuls of the cordial. Then she made a sudden effort to sit up and speak, but instead burst into a passion of weeping. By degrees she was calmed and they bound up the badly blistered hand. The tension relieved by her tears, she was able to reply to their questions and relate how she had been enticed away.

A strange man had come to her in the garden, evidently by way of the hospital as the house gate had been fastened when the others went out earlier. This man had said her Uncle John was waiting to see her. She must come at once and say nothing to her grandmother as it was to be a surprise for her. A carriage was outside the gate with Herr Rosen in it and he took her away.

"I did not let him think I was afraid. Besides I thought Uncle John would take care of me," she said, plaintively; "but he was not in that house and I did not see him at all. They told me a lie."

"In heaven's name what did they do it for?" cried the grandmother.

"Pure wickedness and, of course, spite," said Veronica, fiercely. "That man would stop at nothing."

"They did it because they wanted me to tell them things about father and our visitors and about Monsieur Marson more than any one," said Zia, excitedly. "They said the Frenchman had visited our house quite lately and I was bound to tell them every word he said. I said it was false. He had not been to the house at all, only to the orchard a long time ago. They did not believe me."

"Was that why they hurt you, Zia love?" interrupted Veronica, her voice shaking.

The child nodded agitatedly.

"The pasha put his pipe on my hand instead of the tray directly he asked me a question. It was burning hot, as hot as Amina's irons, and he squeezed my hand inside his own to make me hold the pipe very tight. 'Now tell me,' he said, 'before it burns you badly, tell me quickly,' but I said nothing, only my prayers very fast out loud all the time. I remembered what Mémé told me about the saints and the martyrs and bad consequences if I told tales," she went on in her shrill thin voice. "I told them nothing at all. They called me an obstinate little devil. Then they drank coffee and went to sleep, and Dadi came to fetch me."

"My lamb! My little angel!" said Mme. Severin in a deep, thrilled voice as she folded the child closely in her arms.

"Make ready now, O Sitt," said Amina, hurriedly. "When the trick is discovered they will send for us. For myself I do not care if they kill me like Murad for I have saved our Zia, but she must be taken away at once."

"Yes, with no delay, to the American Consulate," said Veronica, firmly. "Once there we can make our plans. Mr. Luce will help us."

"Oh, it is shameful, shameful!" cried Mme. Severin in tones of anguish, "but we must certainly act and lament no longer."

Just about the time they reached the American Consulate in safety Otto Rosen stirred uneasily and opened his eyes. For the moment he could not grasp his bearings, but a confused look around was followed by an awakening to conscious remembrance.

Bewildered he stared at the vacant place beside him, then at the sleeping Turk. The stubborn child had been taken away while somehow he had fallen asleep. Strange



that the strain which he had certainly experienced during Zia's ordeal should have acted like a soporific. He could not understand it. Suspicion began to stir, yet his first feeling was of relief. Checking his impulse of clamoring to the sleeper for an explanation of the child's disappearance he pressed his hands over his eyes, which were still heavy, got up and made for the door.

The same man still held guard without. He related glibly how the hanoum Effendi had sent one of her women for the child who was now in the harem.

Rosen looked back undecided at the sleeper but finally walked off. His inner man was dissatisfied with the drastic nature of the scene he had witnessed. Threats or a whipping such as given to unruly children had been his notion in advance of coercing Zia. The methods of the Turks applied individually at close quarters had grated upon him. He had started a remonstrance but then hardened his heart at the sound of Marson's name, anticipating he knew not what useful information through the lips of the tortured child.

But to his infinite wonder not one incriminating word had escaped her. An involuntary comparison with Veronica sprang to his mind. Both had the same obstinate immovable will. Was it an Armenian characteristic? Undoubtedly. Bah! why trouble himself about these matters? There were potent reasons now clear to him why he should detest with all his soul any being, young or old, tainted by that traitorous strain of race.

All was over between him and Veronica. That was a fixed and settled fact. Only he wanted to punish her, to humiliate, to bring her to her knees to beg mercy from the man she had cajoled and rejected, whom she had

lured on to the most beguiling of hopes, only cruelly to cast away with utter disdain.

To his own gates was but a matter of a few steps. The carriage in which he had fetched Zia was drawn up in the court waiting his return. At sight of it he felt conscious of an impelling need of air and at the same time distraction. The personal note which never ceased to clamor through every activity of his crowded days was more than ever insistent. This time it urged him to view with his own eyes the band of deported Armenians which he had been told were temporarily lodged on the market place on their way to Der-el-Zor.

He was soon driving in that direction, speculating after what manner the authorities would carry out the declaration of the Ottoman government. The town was fairly quiet again now. With grim intentness not unmingled with approval of what seemed merited retribution for a treacherous far-reaching people he eyed the dolorous herd of refugees.

The majority lay huddled together prostrate like corpses. Here and there little children stood up munching ravenously nuts and bits of bread flung to them by one or other of the crowd around more human than their fellows. Famine, murder and death were inseparable companions of war, he reflected, and no power on earth could hinder the innocent from suffering with the guilty.

Ahmed Pasha had left the spot. The German officer was still there talking to a group of well-to-do Christians who had approached with gifts of food and clothing for the beggared and stricken multitude. They were told firmly, frigidly, that the Wali had received orders from head-quarters that no Christians of any class were to be

allowed to intervene. Such action would only rouse the ire of the populace with worse results. The travelers had all they needed at present. Substantial help awaited them further on their journey. Catching sight of Rosen in his carriage the German officer summarily dismissed the petitioners and rode up to speak with him.

"Temporary hardships only, quite unavoidable," he remarked. "You know what bungling fools those local officials are at organization, no initiative, and still less decision. That explains this situation," with a wave of the hand over the square. "However, they mean to see the matter through very thoroughly now, but rely on our solid support. This is only the first lot of deportees to pass this way. Other bigger ones are to follow, and many large bands are en route by other roads."

"A hopelessly useless lot to look at," replied Rosen, dryly. "Small purpose to convey them anywhere, it seems to me."

"Just so, mere riff-raff," assented the voice of steel. "The majority will soon be sifted out and the elimination will be profitable to the survival of the fit."

"You mean they will die. Some look dead already."

"Exactly! I ought to know after all I went through with those swinish Poles quite recently. These deportations are being carried out on the same lines."

Rosen made no further comment. Indeed, if so be he had felt any compassion at all he would still have been compelled to hold his hands. Such were his own orders from head-quarters. A passive rôle was to be his under any circumstances. Notwithstanding he drove away even less satisfied inwardly than before he visited the spot.

The business of the day was still at high pressure when

he reëntered the Consulate. With a brief inquisitorial glance around he walked through the outer and inner offices. Near the furthest door a clerk rose from his desk and spoke to him in a low embarrassed voice.

Rosen stopped short. "In my private room. That is forbidden," he snapped out.

"She would take no refusal and said she was positive your excellency expected her."

The Consul glared at the speaker, pushed aside the curtain, stared into the room, then dropped the curtain behind and deliberately closed the door.

For a few seconds he and his visitor stood face to face, silent but with tense hostility in the attitude of each.

"I might have guessed it was you," he burst out, "though it is the first time Mlle. Severin has honored my private office with a visit. What can I do for her?"

Veronica drew herself up and her eyes blazed with passion.

"Your callousness makes the blood boil in my veins," she said, her voice vibrating with the deep notes of her mother. "Are you a monster that you can stand there with such words in your mouth instead of showing shame or some small degree of compunction for your cruel and pitiless conduct to Zia?"

"So you know more than I do about the little cat?" he said, coming forward with a low unpleasant laugh. "This shall be inquired into."

"In order that you may torture me too?" she flashed back. "I warn you in advance that nothing you or your unspeakable friends the Turks can do to me would ever make me unseal my lips."

Every word she uttered was barbed with scorn and bitterness. His breast heaved, an ugly light glowed in



his eyes. Revenge was dearer to him at the moment than love.

"What is your business with me?" he asked roughly. "You have not come solely to taunt and defy me. If it is some favor you desire of me you must mend your manners."

"Favor of you? Never! I simply claim a right that you took voluntarily upon yourself when you promised Nicholas to protect the interests of his family. You have not yet forsworn your word though you have allowed his child to be tortured," she said at white heat. "Whatever else I may have thought of you I never regarded you as less than a man of honor."

His lips twitched grimly. "What do you want?" he asked.

She placed a document on the table before him.

"Your signature as well as that of the American Consul which is there already. He knows your long intimacy with my family and the weight of German influence in Syria at the present hour. It was he who counseled me to pay you this visit. You know already that during my brother's absence we had arranged to shut up our house and leave Opella."

"Why should I do at Mr. Luce's request what you do not ask for yourself?"

"Ah! why indeed! That is a question for your inner conscience to answer," she said, a sudden access of grief catching her voice. "Will you sign it? Are you willing to show that you still possess some trace of the humanity Khamil Pasha tried to shake out of you?"

Her blue eyes fixed steadily upon him looked black against the pallor of her face. Drawn to her full height, the black mantle of the East open and falling in long

lines on each side of her figure, her veil thrown back over her hair, she faced him like an avenging angel.

The sight of her standing there so close to him bodily, yet in everything else immeasurably far away, still had power to move him. In the grip of something greater than his will he took the document in his hand.

He read it mechanically while a distracting tumult of ideas fought in his brain. Let her go away from Opella and perhaps from him for all time? Yet if she stayed would she ever be his? Besides he no longer wanted her. He hated her. Then let her go! It was the only wise course. Yet what about revenge for her duplicity? At any rate she was definitely separated from the Frenchman, whom in time she would certainly forget. But then if she went away the personality of Otto Rosen might also fade into oblivion. On the other hand if she remained in Opella circumstances would soon drive her to see what a useful and indispensable part he still played in her life, and how he alone would have power to save her from the impending avalanche of disaster.

Could he, even now that he hated her, endure to see her one of such a throng as that massed on the market place? And if so would not her fate be one of indescribable shame and torture? Could any punishment be worse? Yet—yet—he looked at her suddenly with hunger in his eyes.

"I am waiting for your signature," she said, stung into speech by that look of craving and appraisal which made him own brother to the Turk.

He continued to observe her silently for a moment, making perhaps a final calculation, undergoing a last short struggle of conflicting passions. Then he sat down at his desk, used his pen, carefully blotted what he had

written, stood up and handed the paper triumphantly to Veronica.

Without giving it a look she folded it up and readjusted her mantle.

"Thank you," she said, coldly, and turned to go.

"You had better read it first," he said, hurriedly.

She stopped short regarding him with surprise and suspicion, then with nimble fingers spread open the document. He watched her furtively and noted with secret satisfaction the sudden flush which dyed her face as her eyes traveled rapidly along the lines.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh! I might have expected it of you."

He had carefully erased her name from the permit, making it available solely for Mme. Severin, Zia and one female servant.

"You mean me to take my chance?" she asked, looking at him very fixedly. "I have no objection to running the risk."

"You shall do nothing of the kind," he retorted. "I mean you to stay in Opella. What your mother does is quite immaterial to me."

"You cannot compel me to stay against my will."

"If you go have you realized what may happen to you? Do you know the kind of sight to be viewed to-day on the market square?"

Veronica blenched. "I do, I have seen it," she said, huskily. "My poor people! Once again the martyrs of humanity."

"Veronica! Veronica!" he cried, getting up and coming near. She put up her hands palms outward as if to ward off his approach. "From all this I mean to safeguard you."

"I have no need of your protection," she said with dignity, quickly mastering her emotion and again turning to the door.

Baffled and goaded to the madness of betrayal he called after her. "You need not reckon on another chance encounter with your French lover!" In his voice sounded a note of triumph.

Swift as a flash Veronica turned on him. "What do you mean?" she said, fiercely.

"That you will never see him again. I have taken care of that."

She gave a curious little choked cry and grew deadly pale. Her whole frame shook. She stepped forward to grasp for support the edge of the table. Hosts of questions looked from her eyes, big at last with terror though not for her own danger. Suddenly she drew herself up and advanced, her eyes now ablaze with fury and passionate hatred.

"If you have hurt him I will kill you," she said in a hard, level voice.

"Hurt him? Oh dear no, do not trouble yourself, though if he got his deserts he would suffer the death that all the cursed French race merit at our hands."

She drew in her breath sharply. "What have you done with him?" she demanded.

"He enjoys a position at the present moment that will ensure to him in years to come the same heroic halo of sanctity enjoyed to-day by the prisoners of Amasia fame. You remember that pretty little story of the newspapers, for we read it together, and how it touched and elevated our souls."

She looked at him, dazed, dumb, while her mind labored heavily under the effect of the culminating foul



blow. Pierre was a prisoner somewhere. That was the pivot on which everything else turned. He must have been seen and captured after leaving the house. Vaguely she recalled the cry she had heard when waiting at the gate. It had happened then she was certain. Rosen did not know for he was then in the house with Nicholas, but he must have known later, and that explained his continued silence and absence. As she mustered these facts and surmises together her mind cleared, her energy of soul returned. Not only for her mother and Zia's sake had she still to struggle with Otto Rosen, but now more than ever on account of Pierre.

"Amasia is too far from Opella. You cannot have sent him there," she said, speaking quietly by a supreme effort of will.

"There are tombs everywhere in Asiatic Turkey," he said, evasively.

"Yes, God knows the Turk carries death wherever he rules," was her prompt retort.

He made no comment, but his eyes watching her closely, held for a brief moment the accusing eyes of the girl. Then their glance shifted.

"You will be punished," she said, suddenly. "No man can do what you have done and escape retribution. Destiny will take her revenge on you when least expected."

He got up with a new access of anger, stirred against his will by the prediction.

"This interview must cease," he said, harshly. "Remember you will stay on in Opella unless you wish to endanger your mother's safety. Tell her if you like that I will take means to safeguard your house."

Veronica opened her lips to speak but second thoughts

held her silent. She drew the veil over her face, fastened her mantle and left the room. As she crossed the court the kawass of the American consulate came forward from the arcade and followed her out. Mr. Luce had taken no risks.

## CHAPTER XVII

HOW silent the house, and void of all that gave forth the home feeling! Veronica sat in it alone but for an old native woman, pottering over odd jobs, left undone in the hurry of Amina's exodus with her mistress and Zia. A couple of hours had gone by since these had driven through the town gates in the American Consul's carriage, to embark on the way of escape arranged by John Culver. Even the Consul and his wife approved of the plan after hearing with horror of Zia's ordeal and the startling attitude of Herr Rösen. It was certainly more prudent to slip away in a manner unlikely to be suspected than to run open risks through the journey by diligence.

Veronica had only come back to the house to wind up certain household matters and to gather into as small a compass as possible the personal belongings needful for a visit. For Mrs. Luce had insisted upon her accepting the hospitality of the consulate until a safe way of rejoining her family should open out.

She was ready now to be fetched. Any moment the gate bell might summon her away. This was the first definite pause for reflection since the moment she had left Otto Rosen's office. Of his threats she had told her mother only enough to show valid reason for remaining behind, disliking to add to her anxieties, and fearing that if she knew all no persuasion would have procured her consent to such an arrangement.

Quite apart from the chance of increased danger for

her mother Veronica had wished beyond anything to remain behind. It was her only chance of discovering anything vital about Pierre.

Where was he? A sheltering roof for herself counted nothing against the certainty of the perils through which he had passed and must still be undergoing. The mere thought of that prison tomb of Amasia iced her blood with fear and grief. She seemed overweighted with an unbearable burden from which for the moment there seemed not the smallest hope of release.

What a dreadful day to look back upon! Menace from all sides, dangers positive, and apprehensions of worse to come. Thank God, the little mother was making a bid for safety with Zia and the heroic Amina. That any project engineered by John Culver must contain seeds of success for its achievement was guaranteed by the wonderful way in which, so far, he had outwitted the authorities and evaded capture.

She shivered, feeling forcibly that there was even a craftier brain than his at work, a stronger hand manipulating abominable plots to suppress, coerce, and torture all fellow creatures that crossed the workings of its many monstrous and ambitious schemes.

For she was waking fearfully, though defiantly, to the reality of the ghastly power and trickery of German secret machinations at work through the length and breadth of the Turkish empire. It was a German who had courtmartialed Murad against the commandant's wish; a German who had tortured Zia after himself kidnapping her by a ruse; a German who had devised the character of Pierre's prison and gloated over his terrible plight. It was a German who, riding by Ahmed Pasha's



side, had gazed unmoved, mockingly, callously, at the misery of those unhappy people on the market square.

In her eyes these were but types of that vast horde of Germans without heart or soul who were destroying beautiful France in the brutal and barbarous fashion of which Pierre Marson fresh from home had given them a passionately vivid summary, setting their blood on fire.

If only she had some certainty regarding the true fate of her lover! How to obtain it was a matter in which Mr. Luce might help her. A prisoner was after all an individual to be accounted for. Here Veronica forgot to take into account, herself, that Pierre must have been arrested in the guise of a spy, and that it would be almost a miracle for him to have escaped death. He was not dead, she assured herself, unless Otto Rosen had purposely deceived her.

It was some alleviation to know that her mother would tell John everything; for she did not doubt but that John himself would be in charge of the fugitives. He would carry them to some safe hiding place, and perhaps before long devise a means of flight for herself.

Was that the bell? She started up and ran into her own room for a last look round. She carried a small handbag containing the most valuable of her jewels, her money and a few other important details. A thought struck her, and she at once, for greater security, hid it away on her person as she had always done when going on a journey. Then she picked up her traveling bag and sundry small packages and came out to wait in the lewan.

The door opened suddenly revealing the startled face of the native woman. "There are soldiers at the gate,"

she said, breathlessly, in little more than a whisper, her eyes glittering.

Veronica's courage stood firm in spite of all she had gone through, but while not a muscle moved every drop of blood left her face as for a moment she stared at the door.

"Allah! They are here—close behind me," said the woman in a scared voice.

Slowly Veronica put down the bag and again turned to the door. As long as Otto Rosen had no part in this new attack of fate she felt she could yet face it with unbroken front. Of this she was soon assured. It was a Turkish officer who entered while the soldiers, four in number, filled the doorway. She looked at the officer with all her keen wits in her eyes.

"I must trouble you to come with me, mademoiselle," he said, distantly. "I have brought a carriage for you. It waits at the gate."

"The carriage of the American Consul should also be waiting for me. There must be some mistake," she said in a slow but steady voice. "I am expected at his house on a visit. It is an engagement I must not break."

"My orders come from the Pasha himself. It is his wish that you come away now under my escort without inconvenience to yourself."

"Which Pasha? And how can I know that you hold his orders?"

"His Excellency, Ahmed Pasha, our commandant. I advise you to come without resistance, mademoiselle," he said, significantly.

"Where are you going to take me?"

He bowed with a little outward gesture of the hands. "I beg you to come with no further delay," he said.

"I can take these with me of course," she said in a stately manner, indicating the bag and her packages.

"Certainly, mademoiselle! Here Hussein, carry these things carefully to the carriage."

Her mind temporarily at a standstill was utterly unable to account for this singular and unlooked for twist of affairs. She made her way silently through the garden to be overtaken at the gate by a feeling of panic. She drew back suddenly as if she had just discovered a precipice opening at her feet. In a moment she summoned up fresh courage and seeing that resistance was hopeless she entered the carriage. The door was closed, she heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, a sharp word of command, and they had started. She was alone, the officer and his escort riding.

Her heart beat to suffocation. She felt that some unknown climax was at hand. Nothing she could do had power to stop it unless—her hand crept into her bosom clutching at something concealed.

The more she thought of the situation the uglier it seemed. Ahmed Pasha! What had John said? That the pasha knew her well by sight. He had seen her in the summer hotel. She called Rosen to mind and her fatal influence over him, and how Pierre had declared he had loved her at first sight.

Momentarily she would have scratched and disfigured her own face if that would have made its beauty of no account. For she was no fool to ignore the value of a woman's fair face, or the fact that her own had power to move men in a way of which she possessed ample proof. From the opposite standpoint beauty was an asset in swaying the wills of men, and added to fearlessness and ready wit conveyed a magnetism which she had

more than once found potent to use as oil on angry waters, and to gain her own way.

“Courage, bien-aimée!” she crooned under her breath as a charm to soothe her own mental disturbance; and she leaned back folding her arms closely together, as if to brace body and soul, to meet she knew not what fresh ordeal.

The closely shuttered windows gave back no inkling of the way or its direction, only there seemed more than one sharp turning and the jolting of the latter part of the drive was atrocious.

The carriage stopped. She heard the voice of the Turkish officer requesting her to alight and follow him. Night had fallen. Though the gate was narrow and low, through which they entered after climbing a steep pathway, a building towered, menacing and massive above her, as a prison. Crossing the flagstones of a small closed courtyard by the light of a lantern she felt that she had in truth entered some jail, so forbidding the shadows, and strong the walls about her.

A flight of steps brought them out under a colonnade whence they plunged into a vaulted passage. Veronica, at pains in the gloom to keep her footing, had followed her guide with downcast eyes, but just then light falling from an interior diverted her gaze. She half paused, startled by the dart of a sudden suspicion, which steadily grew with every onward step.

Another steep stairway down which the moonlight strayed to meet her, and this suspicion became a certainty. They had brought her to El Fereidus, the home of the Culvers. Now she came out on the top of the house, on the terrace of the upper room, of the tent, and the flowers and trees.



Familiarity with her surroundings restored a momentary calm of spirit. This was before reflection painted the isolation, the helplessness of her position cut off from all means of exit but by way of the stairs. A lamp burned in the upper room where the persiennes were closed.

"Mademoiselle will be treated in every way as a guest of honor provided she makes no attempt to descend the stairs," said the officer, stiffly. "The guest room is made ready for her use. She has but to express her wishes to the attendant and all in reason shall be allowed."

Several questions hovered on her lips, but only one escaped. "Am I alone on the terrace?"

"Yes! You will be undisturbed. You can rest tranquilly." He saluted distantly and went down the stairs.

To Veronica, overwrought in body and mind at the close of an exhausting day, there came reaction in the form of a wave of fierce homesickness. With sudden anguish she thought of her mother to whom she had turned in every trouble right through her life. Directly this tired feeling had passed away she would go to the further terrace and look out over the river. What if by some happy chance she were to see the little boat slipping to safety through the moonlight?

But not yet, for positively she must rest a while.

She dropped on a narrow divan near the door and leaned her head listlessly against the low persiennes behind, the unhappiness and strain of her eyes hidden under closed lids, her hands locked tightly on her knees.

Scarcely had the sound of the descending footsteps died away than an old woman made her appearance, bearing a tray with coffee and a variety of cakes and a jar of drink-

ing water. She saluted Veronica politely, and at once set about serving her, after which she sat cross-legged on the floor, watching with a mixture of curiosity and admiration in her shrewd old eyes.

After drinking the coffee eagerly, and then quenching her thirst by a long draught of water, Veronica was able to smile at the old woman and to thank her for the attention.

"Your words are of gold, hanoum effendi," came in obsequious reply. "Remember in your happiness that I am always your faithful servant. I have made ready your bed. In the morning when you are refreshed with sleep I will tie your hair, and make you beautiful for the visit of your lord. Bismallah, you are in luck's way!"

"I shall not forget your willing services," said Veronica, guardedly, her worst suspicions confirmed. "Better days will come for all when the guns of war have ceased to speak."

"Ai! Two fighting sons I have given to feed the Sultan's army," cried the woman, diverted instantly to a personal outlook. "Allah grant that I may see them once again before I die."

"I, too, will pray that this boon be granted you. In Allah's day Allah will restore them to your arms. Patience triumphs over all misfortunes."

The woman caught Veronica's hand and pressed it to her lips and her breast. "I could feel it in my soul to die for you, O lady," she said, earnestly.

Shortly the old woman withdrew after protesting afresh her devotion to the new mistress. She assured Veronica by the soul of her mother that she would be left to slumber in peace, that the terrace from end to

end was at her sole disposal. Orders had come from very high quarters to meet the Sitt Hanoum's desires in all possible ways.

Left alone Veronica became restless. She was afraid of the lamplight and eyed with deep distrust the ornamental bed with its Oriental hangings and coverlet of Tyrian blue silk.

A sudden thought of the Bedouin tent gave her more confidence. Extinguishing the light and taking up her bag she drew aside the curtain over the doorway and stepped into the open.

The air was mild and perfumed. Moon sheen transfigured the flowers and trees of the terrace with a fairy-like beauty that was strangely stirring. The sand on the other side of the trellissade glistened like frost in front of the home-like little tent. Through the embrasure in the wall beyond, the river could be seen, lying like a silver snake in the lap of the moon-swept land.

She sat down on the parapet with every thought fixed for the moment on what the morrow might bring forth. Dread lay heavy on her shoulders. It was useless to harbor any notion of instant succor, for it might be days—if ever—it became known what had become of her. In those days, somber and terrifying enough to anticipate, what evil might not be lying concealed to pounce out and confound her, body and soul?

There had been another carriage in the lane when she was taken away. Mr. Luce would surely glean from his servants an idea of what had occurred. What could he do to aid a Turkish subject in face of a power like Ahmed Pasha? Appeal to Otto Rosen?

A shudder convulsed her at the bare suggestion. Yet soon she came back to the idea. Rosen had become a

power. Besides he alone could divulge where Pierre Marson was entombed.

Another point struck her. Was the old woman vulnerable like so many of her kind? If so how could she be used? Veronica knew all the strong points of the house and that no chances had been taken by John Culver, and his father before him, regarding the security of the isolated house. It was no more easy to get out than to get in this strongly built dwelling of the rock cliff except by the free will of those in possession.

To-night she was so tired, so painfully tired, that her mind was only equal to starting ideas and then running them to ground without definite pursuit. She could have wept for very weariness but a something unconquerable within held her from actual collapse.

Yet she was chilled to the heart with foreboding as again she looked out over the moonlit spaces, thinking of her lover and the other loved ones, all in the gravest jeopardy.

"They do not know I am here. They will think I am safe under Mr. Luce's roof. Wait! wait! do not leave me here alone," she murmured to the distant river.

Then suddenly she clasped her hands and prayed with her whole soul, that the God above who ruled that vast universe of the moon and the stars, would save them one and all from the many and great dangers by which they were surrounded, and that with His help and under His guidance she might yet be able to discover a way of escape for herself.

Then she approached the little tent, lifted the canvas flaps and peered inside. It cost her an effort to explore the interior. Her surexcited nerves created apprehensions which beat about her thick as bats in a forsaken



vault, but she found silence and the lingering essence of memories to be her sole companions.

She pulled forward a mattress and cushions and placed them in the entrance, took off her shoes, drew the pins out of her hair and combed it into one long plait. Then conquered by fatigue she lay down and fell asleep. More than once she moaned as if rehearsing in her dreams the struggles of the day, but oblivion soon held her still as one dead.

The silence and loneliness were profound. A dimness spread over the terrace as the shadow of the high cliff stole stealthily forward. Before the outline of the palm trees became entirely blurred into the rocks behind something black and tall moved away from them, and dropped noiselessly to the ground. Soon there came a light, very light, sound as of an animal moving cautiously.

Veronica lifted her head suddenly with a quick drawn breath. A flash of intuition had penetrated her sleeping senses.

She strained her ears to listen to a peculiar rustling sound at the side of the tent. In an instant she had sprung lightly to her feet and was listening intently at the canvas wall. All at once she started back with a stifled cry as, just discernible in the dim light, the head and shoulders of a man suddenly thrust themselves under the turned up canvas.

"Hoosh! In Allah's name!" murmured a voice. "It is none other than your brother, Ali."

The relief was so intense and unexpected that Veronica's limbs gave way under her. She dropped in a huddled heap to the floor staring at him speechless. A little sob bursting from her lips broke the spell of stupefaction.

"Ali, you have come to save me," she whispered. "Tell me how you have evaded the guard below."

"I have seen no guards," he said in a low voice. "No one in the house knows the door by which I came in."

She looked anxiously into the open. "If some one were to come now and find you here!" she said, tremulously.

His white teeth gleamed. "No one will come. They fear the spirits of the house top at night. It is haunted they say."

Veronica shivered. "It is not true," she whispered.

"Allah, no!" he answered quickly. "The mother and child who are said to walk here when it is dark are safe in our tents."

"Then Zorah and the boy are alive and well? Heaven be praised!"

"They are as well as you will be very soon."

"How did you find me?"

"Sitt Anna, your mother, sent me with a message to say that Hanna was with them, and that he would make a plan for you to join them in a short time. I was coming to the house when I saw you enter the carriage. It was easy to follow. I knew you would need me."

"Have you been all these weeks with Hanna?"

"Yes, it was our men who planned his escape from the prison. Mashallah! the Beni-Weldeh have powerful friends in Esh Shems," he said, proudly.

Veronica's mind leaped at once to Pierre. If the Bedouins had engineered John Culver's escape why could they not be induced to find out and free another prisoner? Was it possible to unite her own escape with a parallel effort to free her lover? Yet first it was essential to discover where he was imprisoned.

"Listen, Ali, I have much to tell you," she said, earnestly. "How long can you dare to stay?"

"One hour, perhaps two hours, for this night you cannot come away with me. I came to give you confidence in the help of your friends and to bid you to be ready. To-morrow night I will bring a Bedouin dress for you to wear, and before daybreak the next day we shall be so far on our road that none will be able to find or overtake us."

"Please God," said Veronica, hopefully, feeling as if a breath of cool fresh air suddenly played on her burning head. At once she began to talk about Pierre Marson and the manner of his imprisonment.

The tale she unfolded was of the romantic kind in which the Bedouin mind revels. For they are in complete sympathy with desperate love affairs, especially those which, following the example of Antar and Leila, involve much fighting and arms and horses, and above all a free exercise of intrigue and cunning to carry them through successfully.

"By Allah, if he were in Gehenna itself I will have him out," he muttered fiercely. "Tell me only where he is, and a message shall reach him even though he be hidden in the bowels of the earth."

"That has all to be discovered."

"Let me track out only the locality and it will be enough," he said, decisively.

Ali's boldness scattered to the wind whole nightmares of distracting fears. Veronica felt she could now face the morrow with fortitude, trusting to her wits and her courage to bring her safely through the long hours which must intervene before Ali came again.

She impressed upon him the necessity of going early

to the American Consul to tell him secretly what had befallen her. His help and advice would be invaluable. Ali had wept a few hours ago in the garden over the evil fate that had overtaken his friends. He was now on fire to work on Veronica's behalf, but had become so keen on nosing out the trail of the Frenchman's disappearance that the peril waiting on the girl's own escape easily became dwarfed. Seeing this she urged him to stronger effort, declaring that her lover's plight far exceeded her own in danger, and that the sooner a plan could be woven to accomplish his deliverance the greater the chances of finding him alive.

Ali sat on his haunches, his head thrown back, and in his eyes the wild flicker and savor of the chase, picturing the fight in advance. Hitherto there had worked behind him the cautious brain and ingenuity of his English brother-in-law, but Hanna would now be engaged for some days on the anxious task of piloting Mme. Severin and Zia to the home of their relative. To Ali alone would fall the honors of this new enterprise. He gloated on the prospect, scorning the hazard.

"Be ready when the hour comes," he whispered, raising the hem of her cloak and pressing it to his lips with wild grace upon leaving. "By the soul of my mother I will make you a way of escape."

Noiselessly as he had come so he vanished. Too cautious to step into the open and watch him, though intense her longing to ascertain the unknown way of exit, she rearranged the shifted matting where he had entered and again lay down to rest. At first held wakeful by the new strain of excitement and the buzzing of agitated hopes, later, she fell into sound sleep.

She was awaked by a weird cry, and opening her eyes



saw the old woman, her jailor, with upraised hands and incredulous eyes standing in the tent entrance. Veronica's brows knitted in perplexity. She rose to a sitting posture and looked at her surroundings.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed.

"In the house of your lord who will make you happy and be good to you."

Then Veronica remembered and shivered slightly.

"Give me food and coffee, I hunger," she said, "and later, water in a big bowl, that I may wash."

"Joy of my eyes, let me not serve you here," expostulated the woman. "Come back to the guest chamber where all is ready. Why did you leave your bed? What brought you here? Was it an evil dream?"

"I could not sleep so I walked on the terrace to smell the air. There I saw this tent and being weary I rested for a few minutes and fell asleep."

"You saw nothing and heard nothing?"

"The voice of a child seemed to penetrate my dreams, otherwise I slept well," said Veronica, noting with satisfaction the start and furtive side glances of the woman. More than ever now it was probable she would be left in peace to-night on the house top.

But there were the hours of a whole long day to wade through.

Breakfast over she allowed the woman to comb out and brush her long hair, but then dismissed her, for the oft repeated suggestions of the high and blissful destiny in store for so much beauty soon became intolerable. Solitude was far easier to endure.

With every hour that passed her impatience waxed. Though she spent all her time on the terrace she was

afraid to search for the door by which Ali came lest some unseen eye should spy upon her.

The wildest and boldest schemes for procuring liberty for Pierre formed, dispersed and reformed in her active brain. In fancy she followed Ali to the American consulate, and conjectured after what fashion the plans for her own escape would be woven.

Then, in contemplating her own flight, imagination leaped to her mother and to the unthinkable torture of little Zia, then darted aside to painful scenes witnessed on the market place and in the souks, and on to her battle with Otto Rosen.

Concentration on any one subject was impossible, so stirred to the depths her emotions, so acute the pitch of expectancy to which every nerve was tuned.

Afternoon crept upon her. Soon she was able to sit in shadow upon the parapet of the break in the walls, and send searching eyes into the distance. The freedom of those open spaces far below, the winding river, and the lavender hills beyond called to her with insistent voice. So strong came the call from the precipice directly beneath that at last she had to close her eyes and press her head back against the wall while mentally she gripped for anchor to the positive hope of the night.

Yet the whole time in guarding against one danger she had vastly troublous feeling that another more deadly might spring upon her at any moment.

And then, hearing a sound, she suddenly opened her eyes and saw the tall figure of Ahmed Pasha approaching. Though inwardly she had schooled herself to the inevitable encounter, now taken unawares, in spite of herself, she flinched.

With the intentness of one who watches he marked it. His step instantly slackened, and he salaamed courteously as if to reassure her. With a glint in his gray eyes he saw, too, the color rush to her face as, looking directly at him, she rose and stood by the parapet. In her attitude pride blended with dignity. She waited for him to speak.

"Be seated," he said gravely. "I have come to see with my own eyes if the needs of my guest have been well supplied, and to ask how my orders have been carried out by my servants."

"You mean your prisoner," she said, quietly, "and the only boon she expects or asks at the hand of his Excellency is her liberty."

"The wise are cautious in their demands," he replied. "The liberty you mean would not long be yours if I were to grant it to you this very moment."

"I do not understand you."

"You were in your own house unprotected," he began.

"Temporarily only, for I was invited to stay at the American consulate."

"I knew what would be your destiny if left alone in Opella," he continued as if she had not spoken. "Out of regard for the good doctor, your brother, I have assumed the guardianship of his sister. If in return for the gift of liberty in this delightful spot—"

"Your Excellency must know to whom it belongs," she interrupted with decided warmth, "for my brother married the sister of Culver Effendi."

"You have named the true reason for your presence here. I wished you to be taken to a dwelling that was already familiar, and one you would regard with affection."

A sigh escaped from her parted lips as involuntarily she threw a glance around, and then to the faraway hills.

"I want you to be happy," he said in a dangerously gentle voice. Inshallah, you are going to be happy."

"That is impossible as long as I am separated from my family and detained against my will in this lonely spot."

"Happiness is a plant that can spring up and flower in a single day, or even in an hour," he said, moving a step nearer. "To me the repose hidden away on this isolated house terrace has become an oasis, fed by that pearl of the desert, a fountain of living water, that gift of which the soldier dreams in the heat and fury of the battle."

She remained silent but her figure stiffened and the look she cast on the pasha was more eloquent than words. The oriental imagery was quite easy of interpretation. Quickly she decided to invoke the protection of that reserve ordered by the Khoran towards women who are not of the Moslem faith. Subduing her fear and indignation she made a strong effort to speak calmly.

"Apart from your regard for my brother I was quite sure that from all I heard of Ahmed Pashà he would treat me, his prisoner, with every consideration. Though of another race and religion I always admire the respect shown by the Mussulman for women."

The pasha bowed with gravity. His gray eyes concentrated themselves with inner fire on her face as he smiled curiously.

"A woman though a prisoner—the word is yours not mine—is never powerless for she has always her tongue to protect her, and yours shines as does the light of a



star," he replied, his words scarcely veiling their hidden irony.

Veronica little knew how less than ever before, so it seemed to him, would it be necessary in her case for him to observe the letter of the Islamic law.

"For the sister of the doctor I will do all that it is permitted to a man to do," he went on more earnestly. "Her happiness is precious to me for her own sake. This is not our first meeting, Sitt Veronica. When I saw you with your family in the Lebanon Hotel all eyes were permitted to look upon you. You wore no mantle. It must be irksome to one accustomed to the fashions of France. Allow me to relieve you of it," and he put out his hands.

"No, never!" she exclaimed with a break in her voice, wrapping the folds closer around her arms while her eyes fluttered like those of a trapped bird. She read that in his face which turned her faint and sick. "He who lays hand on a woman against her will is a villain and no true man."

"All is allowed in the name of war," he said, harshly, as he laughed a little in a quick grim way.

"Only to the coward and bully in whose ranks the brave Ahmed Pasha will never be reckoned," she retorted quickly. "Besides such license in any case could only apply to the enemy. I am a Turkish subject."

France had been the word that had unnerved Veronica, starting an agonizing thought of her lover, and his fury, could he for an instant divine her peril. Upon a second thought the same word restored her courage.

"The women of my family follow more than French fashions; they follow the customs of the West," she continued rapidly, and now her voice was steady, "and

there is one we value above all others. It is the liberty of choice in accepting or rejecting an offer of marriage. I have already made this choice and but for the war would have been married."

He started perceptibly but preserved a dead silence, his eyes with a sudden dark look searching her face with piercing directness.

"When the man of my choice discovers what has become of me—" she began again, pursuing her advantage.

"Is he of your race?" he asked, abruptly.

"No, Excellency," she said with a clear look into his face.

"Rosen Effendi, the German Consul, was one of your party in that hotel. He sat by you at table, he played with you, walked with you," said Ahmed Pasha, absently, as if mentally marshaling certain points under one heading to judge of their relative value.

"Perfectly true," said Veronica coolly, her cheeks instantly aflame lending an involuntary inner meaning to her words, "and it was to him, the responsible representative of Germany in Opella, that my brother confided the safeguarding of his family in every way."

"Yet it was to the American not the German consulate you were going, so you told me just now," he said, suspiciously.

"Your Excellency is pleased to jest. How is it possible for me to stay at the house of Rosen Effendi without my mother? He has no harem as you know."

Again her face flamed under the double pressure of his unblinking look and her own insinuation. It mattered little what he believed or took for granted as long as in suppressing the real facts she could shield Pierre, and free herself from this dangerous and intolerable position.

At first in Ahmed Pasha's fixed look there had been something of passion mingled with reproach, but gradually his eyes became hard and grave. He stepped to the parapet and stared moodily into space, fingering his beads swiftly. Could she have read his thoughts her own would have been greatly eased.

Just as he was starting out for El Fereidus Rosen Effendi had come to the Serai demanding imperatively an immediate audience. A message of regrets had been sent out to him with a request that he would return next day at an hour more convenient to His Excellency, Ahmed Pasha. Since the Murad affair relations between them had been strained. Ahmed Pasha was now persuaded that he knew the reason for Rosen Effendi's urgent demand. This reflection started a whole stream of considerations his position could not allow him to ignore.

Veronica standing back against the wall watched him with her heart in her throat, and her hand beneath her mantle clutching hard at the little weapon which Pierre had made her promise never to let out of her possession and to keep always about her. She dreaded the pasha's next movement doubting the decisive effect of her revelations.

Yet as she looked at him, alert and watchful, it flashed upon her that here was a man by whose side such a one as Rosen was in comparison but a glimmering rush-light of a man. The pasha was a man of steel and fire who might well capture any heart that was not already impressed and sealed with an image that no other could hope to efface. For in Veronica the oriental strain, though partial, swept away the barrier of racial prejudice.

"I have stated my chief reason for bringing you here; your personal safety for which I felt responsible to your brother the doctor," he said at last, turning towards her with no visible sign of feeling. Then arrested by the softened expression caught unawares on Veronica's face, he broke off as abruptly as he had begun. His eyes seemed to catch fire. "Rosen Effendi is of no importance, a man of straw only—"

Veronica put up her hand, her face instantly hardened.

"Excellency, there can be nothing in common between you and me!" she said, firmly.

"Except the heart. Inshallah! The heart could yet bring us together," he said very quietly, watching her intently.

"My heart belongs wholly to another. It cannot change," she said, coldly. "Excellency, I ask again for my liberty."

Ahmed Pasha sighed. It was a sigh of momentary renunciation, of unavoidable yielding to fate. Only by winning the heart of the coveted woman could he hope to find a way to defy German meddling in his personal affairs.

"Mashallah, it is a hard matter to deny one like yourself anything she asks," he said bowing with the reticence of his first entrance, "and as soon as arrangements can be made your request shall be granted."

"To-day! I beg of you, Excellency," she pleaded.

"Not possible," he said suavely, "but, Inshallah, perhaps to-morrow."

It required no deep diving beneath the surface to see that he was still hovering at the cross-roads of decision, outwardly acquiescent yet prevaricating in the usual Eastern fashion. His first step would be to test the



truth of her statement by many wily ways of investigation. Time was all he needed to attain certainty. Time to her was the key to freedom, as long as it provided the few hours respite necessary to this end between night and morning.

A formal leave-taking followed and Ahmed Pasha went away. Now that Veronica was on the alert she soon caught the speedy stir of movement and voices ascending from the basement, and a few minutes later—it seemed an eternity—the sound of horses on the road.

For a short space she remained listening, listening, her pupils dilated, her lips set in tragic lines. Then the nervous force that had sustained her during the interview deserted her. She fell on her knees against the parapet, her head cushioned on her arms, her whole frame shaken by the outburst of pent-up feelings.

Yet no sooner had she given way to these emotions than she at once began to set her will to control them. It was so very important to betray nothing to the old woman who might appear at any moment.

A short struggle, fierce and rending, and she raised her head, pressed her fingers to her eyes and then lightly lifted the thick swelling of black hair over her brow as if to relieve the dull ache of her throbbing temples. A long sighing breath slipped through her lips, and then she rose up from the ground and was composedly pacing the terrace of the guest chamber when the old woman, curious and talkative, appeared with the first relay of a well cooked meal.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**A**LI disappeared behind the three palm trees which grew closely together on a ledge of soil and rock at the back of the terrace. The lower face of the cliff at this shadowed corner consisted of vertical layers of rocks overlapping one another in irregular formation.

To one of these slabs the Bedouin applied his shoulder and pushed sideways, clutching the edge with his hands. As if resting in an oiled groove the slab moved noiselessly behind the overlapping stone. He slipped through the aperture revealed and from within replaced the rock by a similar, though reversed, movement. His next action was to strike a match and set light to a lantern on the ground.

He was in a narrow passage so low that in places he had to bend his head as he picked his way climbing a more or less winding ascent. Originally a natural tunnel such as are to be found and often utilized in the gorges of Syria, it had evidently been enlarged and steps cut in the rock at difficult curves in the way. When the improvements had been made was immaterial, but the existence of this hidden exit had been kept a close secret, a wise precaution already proved of rare value to John Culver and his family. Now also it was to be Veronica's outlet to freedom.

Two hundred or more paces and then a huge stone blocked the passage. Supported on imperceptible hinges it yielded slowly to pressure after the withdrawal of

strong bolts. This stone outlet was at the extreme end of an old rock tomb, one of several deserted ancient relics scattered among the undergrowth of the hillocky plateau on the cliff above the river.

Ali closed the turning stone and hid his lantern in a cleft of the rock walls. Then he crouched still as a statue at the entrance of the tomb. When satisfied by stealthy survey of the vicinity that no other human being lurked near to observe his movements he emerged and flitted away like a shadow.

An hour before daylight he was in the town, slipping along close to the walls through lonely lanes and dark alleys, his eyes on the watch, his ears agog. Drawing his cloak over his head and muffled to the eyes he squatted as if asleep in a vaulted passage opposite the American consulate.

The first stir of life from within brought him to the gate. By showing a visiting card, on which Veronica had scribbled a few words in the moonlight asking the Consul to admit and speak with the bearer on urgent business, at once he was allowed to enter the court. The rest followed automatically, and very soon Ali had poured out the whole story to the Consul himself.

Mr. Luce and his wife, already disturbed at Veronica's disappearance, and horrified at the disclosure of her capture, were yet in grave doubt as to the course which they would take.

The Consul knew already of the increasing abominations committed under Government license in Armenia and fast spreading to all districts inhabited by Armenians. The high authority of Ahmed Pasha presented a stone wall to any ordinary request on his part. Mrs. Luce visualized with feminine intuition the perilous

hours which must elapse before the Bedouin's scheme could be set rolling. The situation was complex and needed careful handling.

Ali's intriguing mind was impatient to start without delay on the development of his own ideas. On the other hand the Consul urged him to spend the day under his roof rather than run the risk of being checked in the town from keeping his pledge to Veronica, for then indeed her plight would be desperate.

But said Ali, how procure provender, dress, food, without awaking suspicion unless he went to work secretly in his own recognized way. There was reason in his point of view and Mrs. Luce began to share it together with his confidence of success.

Yet both she and her husband felt that the girl in escaping one danger might easily tumble upon a worse, and with only the youth to defend her it would be a miracle if she reached her journey's end unharmed, if at all.

Some other idea must be evolved, or else Ali's plan must be strengthened by extra securities. While he was hungrily dispatching a meal, husband and wife busily consulted in private without coming to a definite decision.

"If only that man were less of a beast," exclaimed Mrs. Luce after futile beating of suggestions that when examined proved utterly useless.

"What man?"

"Herr Rosen. I shall never get his brutal treatment of the little girl out of my mind."

"He may only have been an unwilling spectator."

"His complicity was bad enough in all conscience, and if he had protested at all the child would have said so.



Yet unfortunately he is the very man to act in this difficult matter. The Germans have it all their own way in Opella."

"They are always wire-pullers," said the consul, irritably. "I see no real reason why he could not be called in now."

"He is certainly devoted to the girl. Unluckily she detests the sight of him."

"That means nothing. If she owed her life and honor to his intervention, gratitude might reverse her feelings."

"You forget she is engaged to another man."

"Whom she may never see again," said Mr. Luce, shortly.

"Poor fellow, that is true. But we cannot spare pity for him now. The one thing that matters is to get her out of the pasha's grip before anything appalling happens. What if she were forced into his harem! I can imagine no worse fate for the spirited, splendid girl. Once get her free and she will be quite capable of settling her own affairs with Herr Rosen."

"He must positively be told of her danger," said the consul, decisively. "Out of friendship for Dr. Severin alone the man should surely bestir himself energetically, and in case of necessity get the German commanding officer to interfere."

"Even that would not move the pasha unless he were given to understand that he had in ignorance abducted Rosen's promised wife."

"I should advise Rosen to let him think so if that were the sole way of getting the girl safely away."

At first Ali demurred vehemently against sharing the honors of rescue with another. Then he secretly re-

flected how the aid suggested would leave him greater freedom to organize the more adventurous rescue of the Frenchman.

One stipulation he insisted upon before yielding an inch. That not a word should be whispered of the hidden passage. The secret must be held inviolate or his sister and brother would never forgive him. Finally it was agreed to carry out the original plan that night. At daybreak next day he would come again to the consulate to report progress, leaving Veronica in a spot that would be perfectly secure in his absence.

By then Mr. Luce hoped to have thought out a suitable way of safe-guarding Veronica's journey to her family, though for the moment he could think of nothing better than acquainting Rosen with her danger. His wife urged him not to delay in taking this step.

Twice the German Consul was out when called upon. The second time his absence was unpardonable as Mr. Luce had left word he would return at a certain hour. The discourtesy was intentional. Rosen could not forgive the American consul for replacing him as family adviser to the Severins. Mr. Luce wrote a note after his second fruitless visit stating that his errand had been of so grave and confidential a nature that no one would regret delay in learning it more than Herr Rosen himself.

This note brought Otto Rosen without loss of time to the American consulate; but it was already afternoon. Valuable time had been lost already. More time slipped away in settling what action to take. The effect produced on Rosen by the startling news was such that Mr. Luce knew that all would be done that mortal man could do to avert a tragedy.

But it would be entirely in his own way. German-like he brooked no other man's dictation. For Ahmed Pasha himself no counter blow should be spared in avenging this unspeakable abduction, but first of all he must be diplomatic. He would go at once to the Serai, see the scoundrel personally, and demand as a right the instant release of Mlle. Severin.

Mr. Luce expressed doubt as to the result of this high-handed example of diplomacy, and was not surprised when Rosen came back at double quick speed in a towering rage at his failure to obtain the briefest interview with the pasha.

"Nothing can be done to-day, that is clear," said Mr. Luce. "The original scheme must go through. This clever young Arab seems devoted to the whole Severin family."

"*Gott im Himmel!* Run the risk of her being massacred or even worse on the route? Never! A preposterous idea," stormed Rosen.

"My dear sir, explain yourself."

"You must know the state of the roads, and how impossible it will be for them to avoid falling in with one of those miserable convoys of deported Armenians."

"Unfortunately I do, and if you would only unite your voice with mine in denouncing—"

"That is a matter we cannot begin to tackle at this critical instant. Let us keep strictly to the vital point of Mlle. Severin's safety. It is impossible to leave her to the slender protection of the Bedouin, however close may be the family tie."

"What then do you propose? She wishes to join her mother in her retreat near Antioch."

Rosen twisted and pulled at his mustache.

"It seems to me she must have her wish," he said with an air of caution, "though it is difficult enough to carry through."

"Can you think of a better plan than the one suggested?"

Deeply cogitative Rosen paced up and down the room before turning deliberately to Mr. Luce.

"Yes, I can," he said, concisely. "I will convey her there myself with a proper armed escort. There shall be no doubt this time about her absolute safety."

"Will she consent to this arrangement?"

There was anger in Rosen's fiery glance at the speaker.

"Consent? She will jump at such a chance unless she is an utter fool and that she never was nor could be. Evidently you know Mlle. Severin very slightly."

His tone and look were superecilious, even insulting. Mr. Luce's misgivings multiplied. Had he made a mistake to mediate at all through such a man? But several points still had to be weighed and settled. Where and when to meet Mlle. Severin, and if a carriage or a horse should be in readiness for the journey.

"Both shall be provided. She can have her choice," said Rosen, as if determined to do nothing by halves. "Besides I must be prepared to meet any contingency that may arise. When is that Arab fellow coming again? When did he see Mlle. Severin?"

"He saw her during this last night. An Arab's notion of time is never exact, you know."

"*Lieber Himmel!*" muttered Rosen, abnormally nervous of a sudden as he stared at Mr. Luce. He was positively afraid for her. Though he knew nothing of the true state of affairs he was horribly afraid, remembering the isolation of the Culvers' home.



"The Arab said she was prepared to wait with perfect confidence for his return."

"Ah, she has the courage of a man," said Rosen with gloomy pride, "and is resourceful, as I have reason to know."

"You do not think you can win audience with Ahmed Pasha later on to-day? That would be the safest plan."

"I was told positively he would not return till to-morrow morning. He was away on affairs of pressing importance."

Rosen stopped short arrested by a question in the other man's eyes.

"This suspense is damnable," he fumed in a choked voice. "If the blackguard touches a hair of her head I will strangle him with my own hands if I swing for it."

Through the rest of the day though he had business of all sorts and kinds to anticipate while providing for his absence at a critical period, and difficult arrangements to make for the journey, time dragged painfully, for he was in a constant fever of acute dread. Yet for all that lurked the old feeling at the back of his mind that fate was playing into his hands, and that nothing could check him this time from at last winning straight to his heart's desire.

Sleep was out of the question that night. While he held a restless and occupied vigil dreadful pictures filed through his mind of the horrors and barbarities to which Armenian women of all grades and ages were already being subjected at the hands of Turks, Kurds and Moslems of every class.

To Veronica midnight came round laboriously enough, her heart within her alternately sinking and hoping to desperation. She stayed in the guest room outwardly

content and even gay till the old woman had gone down for the night. Reflecting on Ali's plan for disguise she decided that while adopting it she would underneath retain her European clothes, discarding only the Eastern mantle.

Then she went back to the terrace of the little tent. Alarms innumerable besieged her at intervals. Sounds she had not noted on the preceding night ascended from the river, the base of the house and out of the far, far distance.

But gradually they died down till by the local stillness she felt certain that Ali would soon appear.

When he did it was unexpected, for gazing through the opening in the wall she had drifted into a deep, trance-like reverie, losing touch with all in the silence but hope of freedom for the man she loved.

Not a minute was lost, a needless word spoken, nor a sound allowed to drop into the prevailing quiet. They disappeared silently, mysteriously. The only sign left behind of Veronica's recent presence on the terrace was the big mantle dropped purposely in a heap by the wall. Its position there was later to create endless conjecture, for her whole disappearance breathed to the native mind a something uncanny, not to be accounted for in any normal fashion.

When the fugitives came out of the tunneled passage into the old rock chamber Ali hurriedly produced and unrolled a bundle lying in readiness.

"Instead of the woman's dress I have brought you a man's cloak," he said in a low voice. "It is safer. Here is the head shawl and the agal to hold it."

"A wise thought, O Ali, but there are my feet to think of. Am I to go bare-footed?"

"Allah forbid such a thing! I have brought red boots like my own but of a smaller size."

"Good! Good! May Allah bless your hands," said Veronica, beginning with speed to adjust her simplified disguise.

She was soon ready and then Ali hiding her bag under his abbai led the way into the open. The air playing upon her face was sweet and fresh. Through the low-toned transparent atmosphere of the night her slim, tall figure enveloped in the capacious Bedouin cloak looked twin brother to Ali as they dipped into a sandy track winding between brushwood high in places as their heads.

They picked up the donkey Ali had left hopped in a leafy covert of the slope. Veronica mounted was more at ease than on foot in the scarlet boots, two sizes at least too large, while Ali's long stride kept pace at her side.

Fear of pursuit was out of the question for many hours to come. All the same it was wiser to press on, more especially as Ali had to be in Opella by daybreak.

He was taking her to the site of their deserted encampment. She knew it well. Behind some ruins which had flanked the Bedouin tents there was a secret hiding place known only to responsible members of their tribe. It was a well concealed cavern that had served as sanctuary for many a fugitive from Turkish justice. Here Veronica was to remain while he went to and from the American consulate, according to the arrangement.

He tethered the donkey in a secluded recess of the ruins, entered the cave, struck a light and was soon able to pass a flaming brand over the rocky walls. If he could prevent it not even a spider should lurk in hiding to molest his guest. Then he quickly collected a quantity

of springy twigs from the brushwood near, and brought them in to form a couch which he covered with a saddle rug.

Veronica commended his thoughtful energy for her comfort.

"Yet I wish we could have gone on without this break," she said, wistfully, "or that now I have put on this dress we could search together for the prisoner of the tomb."

"By the soul of my mother, no! Fear for your safety would hamper my feet like a chain. First I must alone discover where he is hidden. A man of the Weldeh possesses many secret keys to fit a locked door," he said, proudly.

"Heaven smooth your path," she said with a catch in her voice, though his confidence was fanning her waning courage to a steady glow.

"Inshallah!"

He cautioned her not to stir from her hiding place until she heard the cry of a jackal three times repeated. He showed her how to make the exit secure and told her there was food and also water in the saddlebags. Then he vanished into the night.

Though Veronica had the feeling of one released from the fetters of an evil spell she was conscious of a sensation of unusual dread. Both feelings remained with her during the hours she spent alone.

She knew too much about Turkish power in high places to belittle the peril that had threatened her, but to anybody rather than to Otto Rosen she would have preferred to owe her safety. If only she could herself have spoken eye to eye with Mr. Luce or his wife, or have gone boldly with Ali in quest of her mother!



Yet everything was so uncertain that personal action seemed paralyzed. All that constituted her world was in the melting pot. Above all griefs bending and breaking her heart was the bitter knowledge of her lover's captivity.

And here in this cramped rocky interior she was able to taste a measure of the life he was leading. Life? Why it must be the worst kind of purgatory, a veritable death in life. For she remembered every word of that vivid narrative of the prisoners of Amasia. The blackness, the loneliness, the dread she had to endure for a brief interval only, while his ordeal was continuous with no respite at all, and practically no hope to sustain him. For he was not to know that his plight had been revealed to any of his friends, above all to the woman he loved.

She welcomed the thick palpable blackness which embraced her like a shroud. For so must he often and often sit in darkness for hours, and think and dream of her as she was doing now of him. She drew the beloved face towards her through the intervening spaces which divided them. Just when the visualization of his sufferings culminated in a rush of agonizing misery she lifted her head and saw a bright star looking in like a friendly eye through a chink in the rocks.

She took heart at the omen. Her inbred fatalism intensified by peril was ready to accept the portent. The star shone into the dark places of her soul, drawing up hope from its retreat, and a renewed faith in the mercy of God. Still chasing the thoughts provoked by the silvery gleam she fell asleep.

When she awoke the sun was up, transforming the blackness of the cave into a gray twilight.

Had Ali given the signal while she slept, was her first

thought. No, for failing a response he would have come to rouse her. Would he come at all she questioned with sudden panic? Surely, unless dead or captured himself he would never fail her.

Fortified and controlled by the needful rest she viewed the situation with calmness. She ate a little of the bread and fruit she found in the saddle bag, drank some water, and after freshening her toilette in the best way possible under the restricted conditions, she waited with what patience she could command.

Suspense growing apace she slipped out of the cave and stood concealed in the long reeds and undergrowth near the exit. In every direction she darted keen glances, not at all sure from which direction to expect Ali. Wild schemes of seeking her own way to safety raced through her mind now that her own personality was effectually hidden by the Bedouin garb. Daylight and the open air had drawn out every trace of apprehension. Her splendid courage rose like a mounting tide in her veins, and shone in her eyes.

Suddenly Ali stood before her without warning her by the rustling of a leaf. A smile was on his usually impassive face.

"Good! All is good!" he said.

She drew a deep breath of relief before saying, "I have longed for your coming."

"Good, all is good!" he repeated, still smiling. "There are soldiers, a carriage, the pack mules, and the German consul himself. He will take you without delay to your mother."

"What do you mean? It is impossible. I cannot trust the German consul. I hate him," she replied, angrily.

Impassivity, the desert's caste mark, returned to Ali's face, cloaking his underlying feelings whether of sympathy or of disagreement.

"The words you put in my mouth profited nothing. Only the will of the two consuls prevailed. You do not trust the German consul. They lack faith in me. Malaish!"

"They do not know you as I do. Come, let us run quickly away before they find us."

"It is now my sister who asks the impossible. Pursuit of her plan will cast the fate of the Frenchman to the winds."

Veronica looked helplessly around, once again caught in an eddy of desperate uncertainty. Her troubled wide blue eyes had a hunted look. She had not foreseen coming so soon, if ever again, in direct touch with Otto Rosen. The exercise of his influence with Turkish authority was the utmost she had calculated upon, and even that would be an obligation she had hated to dwell on.

A horrifying notion pounced upon her. Did he know by any chance of Ahmed Pasha's assumption to which she had given no denial?

One way or the other she must decide at once. For a moment she stood there clenching and unclenching her hands and staring at Ali, then she turned back to the cave. By the hasty way in which she dropped the desert cloak and tore off the keffiyeh he guessed what was in her mind.

Silently he watched her open her bag, unroll and adjust a broad-rimmed pliable hat with a flowing veil. For an instant she had hesitated between the hat and a lace scarf, then decided that the more European her

garb under the altered situation the wiser for all parties. She changed from the red boots back to her own shoes.

"What shall we do with these Bedouin garments?" she asked, doubtfully.

"Wallah! I will take them for the Frenchman."

For a moment a light broke over her face. Then the brightness faded and left it white and very quiet.

"I have decided what to do. In God's name so be it!" she said, sighing. "I will go with the German consul though only for the express purpose of joining my family."

"Allah is your friend. You have chosen well."

"I rely upon you, O Ali, to keep your promise," she said, impressively. "First to discover where the Frenchman lies hidden, then to snatch him from his prison while he is yet alive. Promise to do your utmost, my brother! Hanna will help."

Ali lifted his head. His deep liquid eyes suddenly glinted with a passionate wildness.

"I swear by my eyes and the soul of my mother I will do for thee and thine whatever is possible and impossible. It is certain that Allah will preserve his life to eat again in the house of his friends," he said in a husky voice.

"Then lead the way, my brother and friend! I am ready."



## CHAPTER XIX

OTTO ROSEN waited in solitude, watching the thicket into which Ali had plunged, some distance away from the deserted camping site, in order to divert attention from the true position of the Bedouin *cache*.

Confident as Rosen had been to Mr. Luce of Veronica's willingness to accept the protection of his armed escort the half hour of waiting was a time of irritating soul turmoil and difficult suspense. He felt he had never cared so deeply about her as at the present moment, that all the love of the past was a mere nothing compared to his immediate feeling.

How would she regard him? Would she look at him with the accusing, contemptuous eyes of their last angry combat? Was it possible to stir up confidence and a new love in her breast after all that had gone before?

Then suddenly he saw her coming and his heart began to thump like a boy's.

She walked with a slow, even reluctant step, as if to a difficult encounter. The free, graceful lines of her fine figure were defined through the silken folds of the thin dust cloak she wore instead of the abbai. The mere sight of her, like wine taken after a long abstinence, made him dizzy. His covetous eyes enveloped, dwelt upon her.

She, too, was alone, having sent Ali back in case of treachery to him. In neither Turk nor German could she ever have faith again. It was solely for her lover's sake she walked deliberately into what for all she could

tell was but a new snare. If it were also to entangle Ali her sacrifice would be purposeless.

She had schooled herself rigorously for the trial of meeting this man. After the first glimpse she caught of his well-known figure standing expectantly under the trees she fastened her gaze on the ground as if choosing her path. The torture of little Zia flared up between them and she had to hide the antipathy which she could not instantly call to heel. She hated having to dissemble her true feelings, and still more the necessity of seeking safety under the German flag. It was exactly what he had foretold to her mother before Turkey had even entered the war.

Above all she was horribly nervous lest the pasha's belief of an engagement between them should have come to his ears.

In fact the whole of life had become a net round her feet. Now as he came hurriedly forward to meet her and she saw the underglow of excitement shining in his eager gaze, she felt the net spreading out and smothering her within its folds. She had vowed in advance she would never clasp his hand again, and the next moment found herself enduring the grasp of his, and even allowing him to kiss her hand.

"Praise heaven we have found you. Now all will be well," he said in the voice of a man who has put all aside but a pressing concentrated interest in the person addressed.

She raised her eyes and looked at him gravely and very fixedly. It flashed across him that she had by no means the air of one who had recently escaped from a great and unusual danger.

"Thanks to Sheikh Ali!" she said.

"To be sure. Where is he? I want to reward him."

"He was obliged to hurry away to other urgent duties. Besides he is very proud. He would be affronted if offered a reward for what he has done for me. It is a matter entirely between his family and mine."

"All the same if ever I can do him a kindness or procure him a boon of any kind I shall hasten to do it. But you are tired, I am sure. We had better find the carriage. It is not far to walk."

"I should like to know the arrangement made by you and Mr. Luce for my journey," she said, glancing uneasily ahead as he led the way. "It should not take me more than a couple of days, or three at the most."

He hurried to explain that the dangers of traveling increased daily. In order to obtain a strong enough armed escort for his purpose he had been compelled to make the journey a semi-official one. This arrangement would entail a little delay to pay important visits on a few local officials en route. He hoped she would not be annoyed that at least in one case a detour would be necessary, but this was unavoidable.

"Naturally I regret and dislike the delay," she said with a touch of agitation that bordered on dismay, "but I must be satisfied that you have made the best arrangement possible under the difficult circumstances. At any rate I am no longer a prisoner. Of course Mr. Luce knows these plans?"

"*Gewiss!* He approves in every way and his wife has sent one of the women of her household to be your personal attendant. You see all travelers to-day do their utmost to attach themselves to an armed guard," he spoke in apologetic tones, uneasy at her air of increasing aloofness. "The addition of the carriage to our party

is nothing unusual. If you can only bring yourself to put up with the inconvenience of delay a perfectly safe journey is assured."

"Mrs. Luce is always the kindest and most thoughtful of friends," was Veronica's comment, as privately she determined that this woman, whoever she might be, should always be with her by night and by day.

And as soon as she saw the mounted armed guard, the beasts of burden laden with all the paraphernalia of a camp, the attendants and muleteers, she knew that Rosen had not deceived her on this occasion. He was taking no risks, though his precautions might well be as much for the safety of his own skin as for hers. If Ahmed Pasha through his ubiquitous spies came to know she was traveling under Rosen's protection his suspicions would be confirmed. Surely he would make no fresh attack on her liberty.

This reflection braced her to the passive endurance of a situation that could only be revolting under any conditions. For she had to suffer his presence in the carriage. But as long as the familiar face of the woman remained opposite to her it would be impossible for him to renew his importunities of other days, those days which already seemed a century away.

However, for once Otto Rosen displayed in his words and manner through the whole of the day a tactful ceremony which surprised and relieved her. The dignity and reticence which marked her own bearing towards him he considered intelligible enough, also becoming to the situation.

What an effort his restraint cost him Veronica had no idea, nor of the constant watch he had to keep upon himself. He had set himself the task of earning her un-



qualified gratitude which even now he was confident would merge step by step into a warmer and deeper emotion.

His scheme for increasing the number of days in forcibly close companionship with Veronica had marched ahead of his wildest hopes. He believed firmly that all suspicions had quieted in her mind. He could read no distrust in her eyes, only a lurking shadow in their blue depths which he hoped soon to chase away. In fact the girl succeeded so well in masking her soul that Rosen was amazed at her calmness after all she had gone through.

At first their road passed over long gentle slopes and low bare hills, with corn land between, and here and there a shallow valley fruitful with pistachio and other trees. The undulating country was thickly set with villages and ruins of all kinds. But for all that Veronica either cared or noticed they might have been passing through a desert.

With great tact Rosen arranged that the first night of the journey should be spent under the roof of a consular agent in a busy little place tilled and befriended industriously by German *Kultur*. In advance of their arrival Rosen had advised her to keep silence on the object and goal of their journey. Though there was little or nothing to fear under the aegis of the German flag, he said, it would be as well to avoid leaving the least trail for Ahmed Pasha to brood over.

Veronica agreed with gravity, and accepted his explanation for their halt in a spot east and not west of Opella for similar reasons. The deflection was prudent. In a day or two he promised to double by a new track entirely, and make up for delay by quicker traveling.

At night she could really rest secure from apprehen-

sion, stretch her tired limbs, close her throbbing eyes. By the morning she was physically refreshed, and had regained much of her latent energy.

Yet though used as long as her memory went back to this mode of getting about the country it was most fatiguing. She endured solely as a means to an end both the journey and the companionship of Rosen with dull patience, and the feeling of one who marks time in a dream.

Their next lodging was in a large khan where the chief guest room was reserved for Veronica and her attendant. Here, too, the feeling of security acted as a sedative. Her last look before falling asleep fell on the woman slumbering on a mat laid across the barred entrance. She remembered nothing else till morning.

Rosen in both places had seen nothing of Veronica after their arrival. Pleading fatigue as an excuse she had remained invisible and unapproachable. He reflected moodily over the whole situation. How to conquer her aloofness was his chief concern. Plan after plan cropped up in his mind as that second night he spread out his detailed map of the *vilayet* and brooded over it for a couple of hours.

He was getting desperate. The pursuit of Veronica's love possessed him like a monomania. He was prepared to go to any lengths to gain the end he coveted.

"*Ende gut, alles gut!* She told me so herself," he muttered, at last folding up his map. "To-morrow we will try a change of tactics."

The movement, noise, and hurry of setting out next morning was in full swing, and Veronica already seated in the carriage before the consul made his appearance. She was looking at a beautiful Arab mare pawing im-

patiently in the care of a groom. Rosen's eyes suddenly gleamed as he noted her interest.

"I am going to ride to-day," he said, casually, after inquiring if she had slept well and felt equal to continuing the journey at once. "It will give you more room in the carriage and I shall appreciate the change."

"I envy you," she said with sudden impulse.

"Is that true? It would be easy to arrange for you to do likewise. If not to-day then certainly to-morrow."

Veronica made no immediate reply. Not a word was addressed to her by Rosen that she did not weigh and figuratively twist and turn inside out.

"I should be very pleased," she said at last, speaking slowly, "though I am quite content to remain in the carriage."

Yet strange to say her first feeling of relief at being rid of his presence was succeeded by another of restlessness. She looked around more than once to be sure he was somewhere in sight. A curious dread stole upon her. She glanced at the driver. Was he to be trusted? And that quartette of armed riders ahead, how was she to know they were not in Ahmed Pasha's secret pay?

Rosen missed no twist of her head. He guessed with a quick rapture of heart something of what was passing through her mind. She missed him, verily and truly. She needed him. He tried the experiment of lagging behind till again he detected the seeking movement of the beloved head. Then he put on a sudden spurt, rode to the side of the carriage and bent sideways to talk to her.

Relief was actually clear in her beautiful eyes as she looked up at him. For months past the mental distance between them had steadily increased. Now he felt that in a moment, at one spring, this distance was

bridged and they were again in touch. He had to exercise stringent control to preserve the friendly attitude he had diplomatically imposed upon himself.

"I have been thinking over the matter of a mount for you," he said. "As it happens nothing could be more opportune if you would really prefer to ride. I will explain more fully at lunch time."

He had given her food for reflection. When they sat down under the little open tent for a meal her mind was receptive to any new ideas put before her.

He reminded her with a grave demeanor that caution must be the chief guide of all travelers of to-day. Various reports of the state of the high road, especially beyond the stage they were upon had been brought to him. Forewarned was to be forearmed. On the morrow therefore he proposed to strike into a route not generally used but certainly safer. One drawback he had been considering. The track was impracticable for a carriage.

"As far as I am concerned it does not matter in the least," said Veronica. "I shall be delighted to ride. Perhaps I could hire a suitable horse at our resting place to-night, and a strong ass for the woman."

"She can easily find a seat on one of the pack mules. If you are willing to ride you shall have the mare I am riding to-day. That was my chief reason for taking her in hand myself to-day. I brought her and a second one with me to hold in reserve in case of an accident overtaking the carriage, or to be ready in any other emergency."

"You have shown great forethought," she said, while again searching uneasily for the secret motive which she never ceased to suspect.



Any moment that she began to feel the least inclined to regard him with leniency quick remembrance hardened her heart. She set her teeth with a savage intensity as later on in the day she sat back white and stern in the carriage, brooding over his brutal share in the terrible captivity of Pierre.

It was not till she was actually in the saddle next day that she lost the fierce depression that had suddenly encompassed her like a thick cloud with bitter wrath hidden at the heart of it. The first fresh taste of freedom she had experienced for many a day came to her directly she sat the mare provided for her use.

By magic her spirits lifted in the clear morning air. Hope fluttered ahead of her, winged with all sorts of new possibilities.

And Pierre seemed very near the whole time. A strange expectation tingled in her veins. His face was ever before her. She could almost hear his voice, ardent, masterful, vibrant with love.

Perhaps Ali had already found him. Perhaps he was free!

Rosen's confidence had fallen to zero in contemplating her unconcealed melancholy of yesterday. To-day it rose swiftly as he watched the dreams gathering in her eyes and took them to himself. His heart leaped for joy.

With the myopic mental vision which is known nowadays to be something thoroughly German, he firmly believed that the present and future had power completely to smother the past. He forgot his foul wrongs against her in the past—the barbarous torture of a child, the despicable mandate which led to her desperate plight, and above all the ruthless incarceration of her lover in the tomb. Ignoring these deeds of darkness as though

they had never been he plumed himself on his circum-spection, his foresight, his excellent arrangements.

Veronica would forget everything else. For her there would be no Past, only a glorious, unending to-day.

Already they had left the ordinary highway to surmount a ridge from which the track dropped into a narrow valley sparsely overrun with live oak and aromatic scrub. When the full glare of the day shone down on the riders a halt was called. The herbage between the rocks was scanty. Puffs of heat gave back from the stone-ridden earth.

Veronica asked if they were at last approaching the end of the journey. Rosen gave an answer meant to be reassuring. It was decidedly evasive. While they pursued their way in the afternoon on a rugged path between wide expanses of fields already ripe for the Syrian harvest, she dwelt distrustfully on his words. Looking ahead and around she could find no trace as yet of the more luscious vegetation of the fertile littoral for which they were bound. Nor were they traveling with the sun, as at this time of day they should.

Yet fear of personal danger had dried up within her as completely as an eastern brook in summer. Only she wanted to get on. The intervals of rest were too long to please her. They were irksome, when like a homing pigeon the bent of her whole desire was towards the goal ahead.

Then to her dismay and infinite annoyance came another unexpected halt. Sunset was still an hour away.

The guide had been stopped by a man on a donkey coming to meet them. At once the advance escort drew rein and gathered round. Rosen called out angrily and then rode forward.

"You had better wait till I see what they are stopping for," he called to Veronica.

She pulled up her mare and sat back in her saddle waiting. Otto Rosen dismounted and talked energetically with his kawass. The man seemed excited. He gesticulated in the suggestive manner of an Arabic storyteller.

Veronica's curiosity was stirred as she studied the whole group. Suddenly Rosen looked back, caught her questioning look, moved further away and again stood in close confab with the kawass.

In a few minutes he turned slowly back, walking deliberately with an absorbed air and pulling at his mustache. The kawass followed him, leading the mare.

"What is wrong?" she called anxiously, bending forward with an eager look.

"Nothing of real consequence except that there is no accommodation of any description in the village further on where we meant to put up to-night. It is too late to ride on to the next suitable place. In addition no one seems to know much about it. If you have no objection we will camp out to-night."

"I should much prefer to continue our journey. Every hour is of consequence to me," she said, protestingly.

"We are bound to rest the animals and also pitch tents in a suitable spot. This will be found a good mile further on. I have ordered the mules to go ahead."

"You seem to have finished your official visits so why can't we go straight on and finish with this tedious journey," she said, with a touch of her old petulance towards him.

"Only have confidence in me, Veronica," he said, quietly, his eyes searching her face which looked at the moment worn and eager. "All our plans are arranged entirely for your safety and greater comfort."

She knitted her brows looking darkly over his head while she gathered up the slackened reins.

"At any rate now we can ride on I suppose," she said, coldly, "if those men will only clear out of the way."

"Certainly," he said, shortly, turning with a frown to his horse. They rode on to the camping ground without exchanging further words.

She reflected it was impolitic to anger him gratuitously much as it eased her own feelings towards him. For in that case he was quite capable of thwarting and delaying her on purpose. She would have preferred to remain in her tent but again prudence prevailed in drawing her to sit out of doors for the evening meal, and later to recline in one of the folding chairs placed for their greater ease in the door of the dinner tent.

She accepted a cigarette but remained obviously disinclined for conversation. Rosen watched her uneasily while he also smoked. Her silence was meditative rather than resentful he felt.

He wondered how best he could meet her mood, or indeed rouse her out of it. After making a few remarks to which she barely replied, he got up suddenly and went into his tent. In a few moments he came out carrying his violin.

Veronica's eyes were closed when he took his seat. She did not move till the sweet long drawn out notes of a favorite melody dropped into the silence of the evening air. With a jerking shuddering movement as if jarred in every nerve of her body she sat up.



"Stop!" she gasped. "I cannot bear it. It is heartless of you."

"But I thought—I hoped—" he stammered, completely dumbfounded.

"You have no right to think or to dare to hope I could endure it," she said in a low and tense voice, clenching her hands. "How can it possibly cause me anything but horror and grief to listen to your music when I am here torn from everything and everybody I love and care for. It makes me suffer intolerably and you ought to know it."

She vanished into her tent. He remained motionless still hugging his beloved instrument while his bow remained suspended in his hand. Beneath the immobility, jealousy still smoldering in his heart flared up again wildly, though outwardly it showed not at all.

By degrees he seemed to come to himself. He retired to his tent and stayed in it a little while. He was in an evil mood when presently he came out. He summoned his kawass at once, gave a few short orders to the head camp attendants, mounted his horse and rode off with a guard of soldiers.

The village a mile or two to the north was his goal. He wished to verify the reports about a large caravan of Armenians with which the local khans were stated to be packed. He had some inquiries to make of another nature, and more than one important visit to pay.

At the khans he was confronted with scenes of unspeakable and pitiful misery. Every room, the roofs, the colonnades and terraces were crowded with the unhappy deported people, chiefly women, children and a few old men. The Turkish gendarmes had given them a day's rest on account of the large number of sick. Many of these had already died.

Here Rosen had planned to pass the night, but he had spared Veronica the pain of these harrowing sights. Did she realize, or in any way appreciate his overwhelming consideration?

Not in the least. Nor would she ever do so unless in some way he could contrive to bring some such drastic facts as these before her notice, and demonstrate by actual contrast the intolerable fate from which he alone had power and the will to snatch her away.

Before he left the village he had discovered all he wanted to know and paid his visits. In accordance with his information he made his plans for the next day. It would not be as long nor as tiring as usual though for his secret purpose it would be all that was required.

A curious glow of exultation was in his eyes when he came back to the camp and turned in for the night. It was the look of mingled malice and satisfaction summed up in the expressive double-barreled word, "*Schadenfreude*."

## CHAPTER XX

**R** OSEN had told Veronica the truth about her lover. The Frenchman, he feared as a rival and hated as his enemy, had been shut up at his instigation in an isolated tower tomb. It was one of several remnants of an ancient necropolis on a bluff above the important village of El Marasch.

That stifled cry in the lane had been no fancy of Veronica's brain. Pierre Marson had been waylaid. Armed men had fallen upon him like hounds upon a fox, bound and carried him off all in a few seconds. His first coherent thought, after the surprise, was of glad relief that it had not occurred before he had been able to warn the Severin family of many impending serious dangers, and to give Veronica grave injunctions, together with a small automatic revolver he had brought with him from France for that purpose.

Kahoum Pasha, pleased to prove the superiority of Oriental prescience over the crude methods of a German consul, had lost no time in acquainting Rosen with his capture.

The two enemies brought face to face, the one so indisputably at the mercy of the other, stared fixedly at each other. Pierre Marson's eyes, cold and profound as jet, showed no signal of fear or agitation. The malevolence of Rosen's gaze had a something in it at once exulting and calculating.

"What do you mean to do with this cursed son of a dog?" he asked the pasha with a harsh laugh.

"He will be examined and then courtmartialed."

"I can tell you a better way of punishing a French spy. Do you know the story of the prisoners of Amasia?"

"Maybe, but it has slipped from my mind. Unfold it, effendi, whose life Allah preserve!"

The narrative related with spiteful and facetious humor by Rosen at once tickled the fancy of Turkish officialdom, which revels in the discovery of new shades of inhumanity to vary its administration of justice.

Kahoum Pasha, to whom the German's mind was an open book, personally overflowed with an ironical amusement that induced him to enter with alacrity into the pleasantry of renewing an episode similar to that of a century ago.

"The tale that is past shall live again. Inshallah, it shall be told in the ears of children yet unborn," he declared.

Pierre Marson kept rigid silence. Not a muscle betrayed that he either understood or cared what that ignoble German related. After all, he told himself, it was but another example of the loathsome methods which the Huns were carrying out wholesale wherever they fought and foregathered. Coarse badinage and gibe of the helpless was one of their favorite pastimes. If so many others had to endure it, and did so with a stoicism that was heroic, he also could stand anything and everything.

Above all, he vowed inwardly, the cur should not be gratified by seeing him flinch or display the smallest concern.

Only one sentence pierced him secretly—*he will be examined*—for by that he understood Kahoum Pasha to mean the various torturing methods by which Turkish



justice removes the lock of silence from a prisoner's lips. Not in all cases to release the unvarnished truth for, more often than not, the hapless victim will babble in his agony any mortal thing, whether truth or falsehood, that will gratify the demands of his torturers.

A week went by before Marson was taken at night out of the city, aching and maltreated in every part of his body. He doubted if he would ever be able to use his right foot or left arm again, so severely had they been "questioned" in the press. That is to say, he considered ruefully, if fate still reserved any opportunity in store for him to exercise their functions in the future.

He was fully aware of the kind of captivity that awaited him. He knew that his enemies alone would know where he was hidden away; that deprivation would weaken him still more; and that the agony and strain of solitary confinement would prey insiduously upon him, body and soul.

Still he had no intention of renouncing hope. There was a remedy for every evil under the sun. The wisest of men had said so. He was an Oriental and ought to know! Prisoners of the Bastille had once never dreamed of liberty. Martyrs of Russian autocracy had escaped from their prisons after appalling experiences to work out a new existence in a foreign land.

He hated to reflect though, that things would have been worse for him but for the intervention of the German consul, who had been present at the latest cross-examination.

"This Frenchman has the obstinacy of a thousand mules," Kahoum Pasha had said. "Now we will see what the cord will press out of him."

And the merciless cord tied round his head had been

slowly tightened till the whole framework of his skull had seemed to be crushing together like a squeezed egg shell. His eyes had bulged horribly and felt ready to drop from their sockets.

Even in his agony Pierre had seen the face of Rosen watching him with a something crafty and devilish in its expression. How the man hated him!

Yet it was Rosen who had called a halt to the torture. A speedy death was not the death he desired to mete out to his enemy, but the continuous purgatory of just such a living death as that of the prisoners of Amasia. Obsessed with the resolve to force Pierre Marson to the torments of a like ordeal, he also burned with an evil impatience for the duration to begin.

"It is enough, Excellency! I have already asked his life as a favor to myself," Rosen had said, dreading that the Frenchman would expire under their eyes.

"Pish! The fellow is a fool. He deserves to die," but all the same the pasha had given a signal that put an end to the torture.

Kahoum had once been Mudir of El Marasch and district. Turning over in his mind likely places to meet the curious fancy of the German consul, and wishing to choose one not too near Opella, he came to the conclusion that one of the old tower tombs on the hill above El Marasch would exactly suit the purpose. Amasia itself, two or three hundred miles away, was out of the question, but a distance of twenty miles was a bagatelle to arrange.

So it was to El Marasch that Pierre was brought. And that he should have no knowledge of the way by which he had come or the position of his prison, he was blindfolded before reaching the village. A few yards from the tomb the bandage was removed from his eyes.

He stood before a curious little tower of which the summit was tumbling in ruins while the substructure was still massive, unbroken and strong. A great pile of stones to one side of the narrow doorway showed that this had recently been cleared.

The guard of men in whose charge he had ridden the twenty miles were not altogether bad fellows. His fluent Arabic had made a bridge between them. He had contrived to hide some of his money during the terrible week just gone by. By a discreet use of backsheesh he managed on the way to secure a precious little store of tobacco and matches that were to bring him unutterable solace in some of the darkest hours to come.

But arrived at the journey's end all amenities ceased abruptly. The charge of the prisoner was handed over to local authority. Under pain of direst penalty there was to be no remittance in the strict and constant guard upon this living inmate of the tomb. Day and night the spot had to be watched. The prisoner was one of high and particular importance. He was to be supplied with food and drink, frugally, plainly, once only during every twenty-four hours.

Pierre cast a lingering look at the sky. Then he gave a sweeping glance over the rock-strewn plateau noting that there were other towers, bigger and smaller than his, scattered about.

With a flash of grim humor he wondered if perchance German "tender mercy" and Turkish devilry had between them evolved the notion of converting this ancient burial ground into an internment camp for others of the living. As far as he could see there was no human habitation of to-day anywhere in the vicinity.

Suddenly he was given to understand he must enter

the tower at once without any ado. He shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who knows it is useless to resist.

"*Le vin est tiré. Il faut le boire,*" he muttered, and without another word he stepped inside.

The moment had come for giving in to fate. But not blindly, stupidly. He would know the exact nature and extent of his prison, and be quite sure that he was not to share it with snakes or scorpions or other vermin of the kind. While the pile of stones was being noisily replaced in the entrance he closely investigated floor and ceiling of the interior, together with the narrow stone shelves which had once been resting places for the dead.

An interval of suspense when he watched, his spirits at zero, fearing that every scrap of daylight was to be walled out. He knew better than to express his own views on the matter.

Then came the reaction which by contrast was akin to rejoicing. The devils had left him an oblong aperture at the top of the doorway. A peep of the sky, the vitalizing air of heaven were yet to be his priceless possessions.

Why, he was in clover compared with a poilu in a water-logged dug-out! His first rapid thought cemented into a resolve to cherish the fancy that he was acting lonely sentry in an advance outpost, and that his comrades, though out of sight, were not far distant.

*En garde!* always and unceasingly. Never to lose grip of his will or of his tortured mind. To keep both fixed stubbornly on the hope—however remote—of some respite, or change, or release.

This was the hard almost impossible task Pierre Marson imposed upon his soul. And the chances were that he might emerge triumphantly for he was made of sterner



and more virile stuff than many men. For it was not the body that would conquer in this unnatural setting of existence, but the something intangible of the spirit, that works invisibly, that spark which feeds with its immortal fire its tenement of clay, however hard pressed, to the very verge of dissolution.

And he was glad, inexpressibly, even rapturously glad, that not once had he been tempted to let a message slip secretly through to the Severin family. Not a syllable of vital importance had his torturers gleaned for all the pains of their inquisitorial inquiries. What was serious in contemplating possible chances of escape was the danger of engulfing friends who might help, into as deep a pit as he had dug for himself.

For this reason he had not ventured on the least effort to acquaint Veronica with his plight. He hugged the notion to himself that nothing could or would arise to harm her in any way. That the German consul would be a menace to people who were his friends he had failed utterly to grasp. The special malice to himself he attributed to the microbe of hate sedulously cultivated by the Hun for his enemy.

By now, he considered, Veronica would be far enough away from Opella, in comparative safety. Prayers of thankfulness filled his soul that she would have no idea at all of the calamity that had overtaken him. His silence she would naturally expect, though he divined more than ever by his own emotions the measure of the grief which had followed their leave-taking.

He had the power of calling up the image of his love, vividly, realistically; the blue, fathomless eyes and above them the black of her glorious hair, then the sweeping brows, the sweet firm lips with their ravishing curves.

It was a magic he indulged in through many still and wakeful hours. These, by the very hopelessness of the vision, were followed invariably by days when he was only conscious of a steady mist of pain, and a sea of dumb depression.

For in such hours he mourned for the black agony of France, and his powerlessness to continue and fulfill the service for which he had braved every peril that meets and pursues both the military and civilian secret agent in time of war. For his particular task, intricate, and, if successful, to prove of infinite value to the Foreign Office, a man of his linguistic abilities and thoroughly in touch with Oriental mentality had been essential.

He also had the mortification to brood over, that but for his turning aside from his prearranged scheme of action to what was in truth a personal affair he might still have been a free man. For he had no inkling of how Kahoum Pasha's agents had marked down and followed him from the moment of his disembarkation on Asiatic soil from a little Greek steamer.

Constantly brooding and thrown back upon the resources of his own mind, thoughts of war in the abstract would come to him again and again. He reflected how often it happens that the price of war is injustice, because it does not always settle what is right. And why? Because war simply proves that might is right, in a word settles which combatant is the stronger, and not whether his cause be just or unjust. History records time and again how the just cause has often been lost in war, and the unjust has triumphed.

Then if might be the ruling force of this earth, are we not all blind creatures of fate, he would ask himself, or do we make or mar our own destiny? It seemed

strange to him that men should fear anything at all. Death would come when it had a mind to come and not a second sooner or later.

And then as if chased by a thousand invisible devils he would start up and limp incessantly up and down and round his cage of stone, hailing the persistent ache of his foot as a door which shut out his thoughts. He would count his steps, and measure them mentally in centimètres, mètres, kilomètres. He ticked off the days one by one by scratching with a stone on a slab of rock.

Times came when he tried not to think at all but to blot out everything by singing lustily, songs of war and "la Patrie," to be followed by operatic snatches, and often a thrilling and tender love song.

"Allah has certainly taken his wits," one watchman said to the other significantly the first time they heard these songs.

"Wallah! He is mad—*majnun*," assented the other, at once starting a wailing chant on his own account.

Thus the days went by, and the weeks, and still Pierre kept his reason, and never did he so far lose grip of his will as to sink in spirit to the bedrock of despair.

Not once but a score of times he conned over every instance he could recollect in fact and fiction of men who had made good their escape from prisons far harder to break than his own. He nursed the notion that with time there would come a slackening in supervision, or that other watchmen might be placed on duty who would be amenable to a bribe. But for both these possibilities he must hold his soul in patience. Premature action would but prove a foregone disaster.

Yet so prone is a captive to hope or to dread that he

seeks a mystery in the slightest unusual sound he hears. So that it happened one evening when Pierre watched the strip of sky he called his window suddenly take on the gloom of night, his sharpened ears caught a sound of footsteps walking upon stony ground.

Was he going to be freed? This was his first swift thought.

Cool reason took its place. He smiled bitterly at his own folly, recalling the isolation of his prison and the remote probability that any one likely to procure his release would ever be able to find him out.

Yet footsteps certainly approached. It was not the hour for his dole of food and drink. Should he hazard a cry before the unknown pedestrians passed on without knowing a fellow creature was immured in this tomb?

Still another thought! He laid a shaking hand on his damp forehead. Perhaps they were coming to kill him as once those prisoners of Amasia were killed. Murderers choosing to veil their crime in the shade of night.

Now the footsteps stopped, though further away he still heard a curious shuffling as of native slippers over the stones. Yes, there was no doubt of it. Out of reach of all aid, like a rat in a trap, he was to die.

He braced himself for the inevitable, expecting every instant to hear an attack on the barricade of the doorway.

Was it delusion, or had some one called him by name? He stood up suddenly.

"Marson! Are you there?" asked a voice in guttural French.

"Who speaks?" said Pierre, after a small pause.

"Rosen, the German consul! I am in camp outside



the village. It may interest you to hear that Mademoiselle Severin is in camp with me."

A pause again as if a sharp wind had caught the breath of the listener within. Then—

"You lie!" shot fiercely into the night.

"It is the plain truth. She is in camp with me. We have been traveling together for a week. We shall be married in a few days."

"Liar!"

"Listen well to what I say! The French army is at its last gasp. The English have evacuated Gallipoli. The Central Powers are smashing the damned Entente hand over fist."

"You devil! You cur!" Pierre's voice was hoarse, horribly hoarse.

"Au revoir!"

Otto Rosen had not purposely made tracks for El Marasch. It was one of the suitable rest places that came into the cross-country itinerary he had planned.

When he had realized the fact at an earlier hour of the journey he had glowed inwardly. Not that he had meant Veronica to glean the slightest suspicion that might unsettle her mind through commiseration. But he had promised himself, as far as the detestable Frenchman was concerned, a revengeful stroke full of the vicious humor which, being a German at war, was as manna to his mean soul.

Somehow during the later stage of the journey his desire had spluttered out. But for Veronica's angry attack upon his violin they would have passed harmlessly on their way. He would not have visited El Marasch at all. Well would it have been for him if he had refrained. Fate has a way of letting the cunning at

times overreach and trip themselves in, the meshes of the snare they lay for others.

Sweat poured from Pierre Marson's forehead when he was left alone. By daylight his face would have been seen to be knotted with harsh deep wrinkles and twists. He was breathing hard.

The bare innuendo that his Veronica was in the power of such a villain started a chill through every vein, and then immediately filled him with a rage so violent that he could have shouted and screamed at the top of his voice.

But give the taunting monster a chance to gibe again? Not likely! He knew it was a lie, a diabolic lie, he told himself; but if there were the smallest substratum of truth in the horrible statement it would be certain she was there, a captive against her will.

At this point he started to curse in a low level voice. It was an outlet that saved him from losing his senses, though for the moment he had certainly come to the end of hope.

"*Courage!*" was suddenly uttered in his own tongue, in a low penetrating whisper through the aperture of the doorway.

Pierre jumped to his feet and rushed like a bull at the barricade of stones. He thought that Rosen was still there, listening to the effect of his disclosures, and now piling a degrading insult upon the foul blow he had already dealt.

"Patience and hope for a few days, perhaps a week," said the same low voice. "I dare not stay. A bientôt!"

A small package came flying through the aperture and dropped at Pierre's feet. He picked it up with the feeling of one who dreams and dreads to waken. He listened

to the soft stealthy footsteps moving away, and the sound of them growing fainter and fainter upon the silence of the night.

Then suddenly he heard the guards talking again.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE second morning after Veronica's resentful outburst she opened her eyes with a singular feeling of refreshment. She had felt languid and inexpressibly weary the whole of the previous day after a white night in which she had tossed from side to side, haunted hour after hour by a despondency that was own twin to despair.

But this last night, just over, she had slept so well that she did not once open her eyes till the pale light of dawn was peering through the canvas walls.

She got up noiselessly so as not to awaken the woman, dressed swiftly, unfastened the flap of the tent and slipped through its uncovered mouth. Once in the open she drew in the air of the young morning as though a draught of spring water were at her lips.

Then she looked around. Not a creature was yet astir. The group of tents sheltered by a clump of trees seemed asleep. Behind these stretched the black line of tethered horses and mules. Further away, round the dead embers of the camp fire slumbered the soldiers and mukaris, huddled in their Eastern cloaks. Even the sentry had squatted down, over-powered by sleep, his face hidden between his arms.

While Veronica dressed, the notion had come to her she would like to dip her face in the stream of which, last evening, she had caught a glimpse, through the reeds and bushes of its banks, before riding into camp. She



could now trace its course about a mile away at the foot of a long slope, descending from the high ground where the camp was pitched.

Quickly and apparently unobserved she hurried over the scrub strewn ground. Perhaps, while all was still and deserted, she might even bathe in the little river as so often she had done in holiday time in the sheltered pools of Lebanon.

Dawn was painting the eastern sky above the distant ridge across the valley in crimson and gold, with great flaming splashes, and streamers of the color of blood.

A strange desolate feeling stole to meet her through the cool loneliness of the morn. As she drew near to the hidden stream, through openings in the thicket, she was able to glimpse the water beyond. The color of the water was red, the blood-red color of the eastern sky.

The reflection of that gorgeous sunrise, she told herself, yet her step lingered in approach, and a sudden look of fear darkened her eyes. Some premonition urged her to turn back at once, but like a magnet the lure of the river prevailed.

Now she was near enough to push a way through the thin line of tamarisks and willows, but she stopped of a sudden with uplifted head. A smell was in her nostrils that she could not mistake—the unspeakable stench of death.

Again she moved forward, like one mesmerized, but now at a creeping pace. She shuddered, her teeth chattered, as cowering close to the water edge she peered through the bushes. Her brain reeled at the sight revealed to her stupefied gaze.

Great Christ! Was she herself alive and awake? Or was she in the bonds of as frightful a nightmare as was

ever conceived by human imagination? In all the world it seemed to her she was the only being left alive.

For death and only death confronted her in its most ghastly form. Corpses by the hundred lay thick as fallen leaves everywhere her sight could reach, on the rocks, up and down the banks, among the bushes on the river brink, and choking the stream. Corpses of men pierced by bullet and sword; of women mangled and stripped of all covering but their trailing hair; of little children slaughtered like sheep, lying naked and huddled together by their mothers' side.

It was a blood curdling spectacle. And, though Veronica did not know it, such sights were of daily occurrence. Innocent Armenians of all ages were being massacred in tens of thousands in the most devilish and torturing fashion that the brutality of Turk and Kurd could devise. Not a finger was lifted by Germany to stop it, nor as yet a protest by any neutral nation to compel Turkey to stay her hand.

Beads of water broke out on Veronica's temples. An irrepressible cry of anguish was wrung from her dried lips.

"O my God, give me strength!" burst from her. "Strength for vengeance—vengeance!"

But were they all dead? Might there not be one fellow being she could save and drag back to life? One of those babes perhaps, or that young girl lying with outstretched arms by the water edge?

But not a movement was perceptible, except in the stream where the current rocked the crowded bodies to and fro with a ghastly rhythmic regularity.

Suddenly she pressed her hands to her ears with a distracted gesture, her head bending low and forward with

partially closed eyelids. She had come to the border line of sanity. A deadly paralyzing fear had penetrated at last to the very core of her brave soul. All reality had dropped out of life. She was alone among the dead of the universe, in the power of unlimited fear, herself a shadowless ghost in the land of nowhere.

A touch, a warm living touch stung her to life.

She screamed, and the next instant was struggling with all the strength lent by ungovernable terror. For a man's arm was around her, pulling her away with might.

"Come away! You shall not stay here. It is not a fit place for you to be in. Come, my Veronica! Come! You are safe with me. Nothing shall harm you. Come away!"

It was Rosen. His voice was agitated, his face livid, his eyes strained. The experience was even more drastic than he had anticipated. He had seen Veronica flit away from the tent and followed her through the undergrowth, where he had sat in ambush to spy upon her unseen. He had planned that she should see this gruesome sight, but of a sudden as he watched he had feared for her reason and promptly intervened.

With rapid revulsion from panic to unmitigated relief her resistance to him stopped dead. Though she could hardly hear his voice for the blood that sang in her ears, she turned and clung to him tightly like a deadly frightened child.

He was alive. He was a bit of the old normal life from which she seemed to have been separated for a million years. A great trembling came over her like an ague attack.

"Have no fear, *meine Geliebte*," he whispered hoarsely, holding her close. "We will go far away at

once. It was an error that made us halt so near this terrible spot. I did not guess."

The lie was well told. Veronica had no suspicion of this latest trap to fling her a willing captive into his arms. She moaned dully and frequently, like one in great mental distress, as she allowed him to support and guide her back to the camp.

The attendant was standing perplexed and anxious before the tent. She saw them coming and ran to meet them.

"The *Sitt* is tired and not very well. Bring coffee without delay," he ordered.

He put Veronica in a low canvas chair in the tent entrance. When the coffee came he dosed it with cognac and made her drink it at once. Obediently she gulped it down.

Then with the air of an elder brother he gave directions for the prompt packing of the traveling bag. Veronica paid no attention beyond following the woman's movements with stupefied gaze. She had the look of one who has been drugged.

Rosen doubted if she had strength left to sit her mare for the day, and longed for the carriage he had dispatched to Opella. Still, now his object was attained beyond his wildest anticipations, he meant to make a bee-line for the railroad, and join the train to complete the journey he had planned before leaving home.

He vowed inwardly that atonement for this latest ordeal should be of a kind that would later erase its entire remembrance from Veronica's life. He condoned the infamy of his diabolic plot by reflecting that only an ocular demonstration of the alternative fate awaiting her could have broken her stubborn resistance.



After starting on their way he kept closely by Veronica's side on the constant watch for any relapse, but always an expert rider, she rode mechanically without any conscious effort.

As soon as they were well away from the ominous place of death he called a halt. Cushions and a rug were spread for Veronica under a tree screened by some wayside bushes. She submitted to be lifted from her saddle. A meal was quickly ready, and when he pressed food upon her she began to eat with the obedient action of an automaton. Some spring of her mind seemed to have run down. She did nothing of her own volition.

Rosen could not keep his eyes away from her. Closely and incredulously he gazed at her like a man who dreams, feeling that at last after a fearful struggle she was his very own.

Nothing could or should part them now. The future rose up before him, rose-pink as a summer dawn. And he was in a fever to be up and away. Suppose she were to fall ill while they were still out of reach of help and remedies to nurse her back to health? When he had held her hands chafing them in the tent they had felt like dead things, nerveless and limp, yet instead of being cold they had been dry and burning to the touch.

His heart grew big with anxiety as he sat looking at her with intensity. Such was his obsession that it shut out all and every recollection of the horrors that had worked the cruel change in Veronica.

Besides he was worried about another vital matter: the fidelity of his escort. As a rule such guards were keen on traveling thus, for it meant regular daily payment from the personage they protected, whereas the payment

in the Sultan's army was ever a long deferred and doubtful quantity. To-day there was disaffection in many ranks of the army, and these men looking ahead would see nothing at the journey's end but active service with little or no pay.

Of the personal attendants and muleteers Rosen had no doubts, but more than once he had noticed the soldiers talking apart from the rest, in the stealthy way, with furtive side glances, of those who fear to be overheard. He suspected they were plotting to desert, as so many of their comrades had already done.

The railway was another day's journey ahead. There was still a night to be spent in camp. Anyhow Rosen felt he could not do better than try to cover the ground quickly as possible. Provided of course that Veronica could stand being hurried.

"Are you rested enough?" he asked, considerately. "Do you feel able to start again now?"

She looked at him, after he repeated the question, with motionless eyes and a droop at the corners of her mouth.

"Whenever you like I am ready," she said, in a voice as colorless as her face.

"At noon we will rest again," he said, encouragingly.

She shook her head.

"We will see later," he said, anxiously.

Up to the present Veronica's manner had been curiously calm, but now she got up in a hurry. It was her first voluntary action since the great shock.

"I prefer to go straight on to the end of the journey without stopping anywhere else," she said with the same toneless drag in her voice.

He called out to the nearest attendant, who ran off to

carry out the imperative orders. Soon they were again in the saddle following the baggage mules, which had caught them up and gone on escorted by half the guard as usual.

Until that little rest had come by the wayside every emotion, but the instinctive horror which had numbed her, had forsaken Veronica. Now by slow degrees her brain began to recover its thinking power, though only spasmodically. And her first coherent thoughts enveloped the distant figure of her mother. A craving was upon her clamoring to be gratified. That she should ride on faster and faster without slackening rein until called and gathered, like a chicken under the sheltering wings, she could run and hide her face in the sure refuge of her mother's arms. Then all would be well.

Momentarily she was oblivious of that other love whose image up to this moment had been to the fore of all others, and for whose sake she found herself in this desperate situation. Her eyes dived unceasingly into the distance, dazed yet shining, as her mind held on to the one and only besetting idea that seemed able to clear the road to reason.

To the man riding near her she paid no heed nor gave any thought at all. Yet even at that moment he was secretly evolving plans for an immediate marriage. Nursing the delusion of his final conquest over Veronica's will he was more than ever confident that she would fly joyfully, and without a backward look, to the security assured by his love and name.

Excitement grew upon him as he mused incessantly over his starved passion. His anxiety sank to zero. The fevered light of Veronica's forward gaze only encouraged him the more to belief in her rapid recovery. Soon, very

soon, would she be confessing in his arms what a dreadful mistake she had made, and how for the first time she had come to know the true inner meaning of love.

While on the quicksands of delusion he built up the baseless fabric of his fool's paradise the wheels of Fate were turning fast. The Nemesis that waits in secret ready to strike at the predestined moment was rushing up swiftly to meet him.

Just then they were pushing on over rough yet fairly level ground at a smart pace. Rosen began to wonder how it was the pack mules had forged so far ahead. They were quite out of sight. It was possible they had just dipped behind the rocky ridge towards which their guide was steadily advancing.

Rosen looked back and was equally surprised to find how far ahead he was of the rest of the escort. It was necessary the whole party should be solid in these unfrequented byways.

Angrily he called out to the kawass, who rode behind, bidding him turn back at once and hurry up the laggards.

The plain though rough was inclined to be swampy except near the tamarisk bushes which bordered the track. And now they started to climb the slope by a path so narrow and stony that they had to ride single file.

Rosen on his chestnut mare led the way, preceding Veronica by several yards.

"Have a care!" he called back. "There is a sharp bend in the way and the path is slippery."

Low scrub and stumpy pine trees were scattered over the hillside. The two riders were quite alone on the rough ascent when of a sudden the bark of a rifle broke



into the silence. All at once a bullet whizzed through the trees and hit a solid mark close at hand.

Abruptly the guide turned his horse sideways and stared back. The next instant he was spurring up the track at breakneck speed, solely concerned in the safety of his own skin.

"Heaven! What was that?" exclaimed Veronica, awakened on the instant, as she reined in her startled mare.

Rosen instead of replying reeled in his saddle, swaying from side to side. Suddenly he fell heavily to the ground.

His mare reared and snorted. As with a prolonged frightened whinny she started briskly up the hill the black figure of a Bedouin, with head and chin closely muffled, sprang down the bank. He seized the bridle, pulling her up sharply, then turned her round.

Veronica staring in stupefaction at Rosen paid no attention to what was happening further up the track nor on the plain. Suddenly she swung herself out of the saddle and ran up to the fallen man.

He was lying huddled under the bank, so that she was able in a moment to prop him against the rock. With shuddering of heart while raising his head and shoulders she saw a thread of blood trickling from the hole made by the bullet behind the ear. The wound was mortal. He had been shot at close range by some one concealed in the trees.

From the plain below came the rapid crackling of fire-arms, to the accompaniment of fierce loud cries. A party of Bedouin ambushed in the tamarisk thicket appeared to have waited for the signal of the shot on the hillside and then rushed out upon the guard. In a very short

time these were overcome, and their horses taken from them. One or two soldiers lay with outspread arms face to earth, but the others were running away as fast as their legs could carry them, thankful to escape with their lives.

"My God! What shall I do?" murmured Veronica still kneeling by Rosen as she tried to staunch the blood, using her handkerchief as a swab. With all her might she tried to recall what was the right thing to do for a wound of the kind, but something had dried up in her brain. She could not think.

She seemed to have knelt there for ages looking at the man's graying face. In reality scarcely a moment had passed before a voice sounded close behind her.

"Leave him alone!" it said sternly. "He has met with his just deserts. Get up my girl! There isn't a moment to lose. Here is your mare."

She turned her head, caught sight of the Bedouin garb and sprang to her feet. Her fingers moved nimbly beneath her cloak. The next instant she was pointing her revolver at the man standing before her and would have shot him but his hand quicker than hers darted forward and clutched her by the wrist.

"Are you mad? Would you shoot a friend, Veronica?" he said, slipping down the folds of his kerchief and showing his face.

"John Culver, you?" she stammered, agitatedly. "You have shot the man who was doing his best to help and bring me to safety."

"I would do it a second time if I had the chance. Has he deluded you by a lie as he did my little Zia? He who hides his evil that evil will kill him."

"No! He was taking me to her and to mother."

All the fight had again dropped out of her voice. It seemed to him that she was speaking with the air of one who had been badly cowed.

"Taking you to your mother? Do you really believe that? Tell me where is the sun? Over there, west at this hour. In which direction were you going? Due south. He had no intention of taking you to your mother. You shall tell me presently how you came to be in his clutches. Come now, into the saddle at once!"

"We cannot leave him there alone," she protested, dully, hanging back.

"Come! He will be found soon enough, but as surely as we stay here he will have cause to jeer at us more in death than ever he did in life."

"Is he really dead?"

"Dead as a nail," asserted the Englishman grimly, "beyond repentance and not deserving of a tear. He has met a death that is a thousand times too humane for him. For it is such as he who are egging on and daring the Turks to their worst atrocities. He should have been tortured like our innocent Zia, or worse—like Zohrab and Vartakis."

"What do you mean?" Her voice spoke fear and horror for she knew the names well.

"They have been murdered by Enver's butchers—brutally, foully murdered, two of the finest and bravest men in the Ottoman empire. Dikran Ghilighian, your famous writer, has met the same fate. There are countless others. I tell you, Veronica, the land throbs with danger of all kinds. It is rife with death."

"I know—I have seen—hundreds, this morning," she gasped, covering her eyes with her hand.

"No wonder you can hardly grasp what I tell you,"

he said more gently, as he drew her towards the mare. "By hook or crook you must all get out of it as many as possible. I have set myself the task of saving all I can. By Allah's help I will myself snatch many a victim from the shameful sacrifice."

"John! I will help you," she said with a little spasm of her native spirit as he lifted her to the saddle.

His heart contracted as he looked at her. She was deadly pale, her eyes big and tragic, not from the immediate panic but that other merciless terror which had gone before. But this was not the moment for sympathy or inquiry. They must be off though there were a hundred questions he wanted to put to her.

She had not made one inquiry herself about her own family, nor about Zorah and the boy. It was so unlike Veronica. And the name of Pierre Marson had not passed her lips, though John knew from her mother what the girl had suffered through Rosen's brutal revelation. He was positive that more had happened to Veronica since then than he had any idea of. It would all come out later.

And he had news, great news, to tell her about her lover. That must also wait. He was sure she could stand neither the excitement nor the suspense which would certainly follow his disclosures.

"We have a good two hours' steady riding before us, and we may have to get further away by morning. It all depends," he said. "One thing I am forgetting, though. This villain is probably carrying important documents on his person. We must have them all."

In a moment he had emptied the contents of the dead man's pockets into the saddle bag. Then, reflecting that the finding of the body would be delayed if removed from



the track, he carried it into the long undergrowth close by.

After this he led both horses to the foot of the hill and there gave a curious bird-like cry which rallied the Bedouin riders on the plain. There followed a brief excited passage of mutual congratulation and of friendly greeting to the relative of Hanna, by no means a stranger. Then they closed round him and Veronica, and, leading the captured mares, rode off towards the descending sun, a strong compact little party, taking advantage of broken tracks which snaked warily through deserted country, and losing no time by the way.

"How did you find me, John?" she asked as they climbed a steep bit of the way in a maze of low hill. John had dismounted and was leading his horse by her side.

"Pure luck, or thanks to some blessed providence, for I thought till two days ago you were safely housed under the American flag," he replied, once more speaking in his old quiet way. "Pastor Kasbarian was in great trouble when we reached his house. News had just come through that his daughter-in-law and children who had been visiting her family in Killiz had been collected and carried off with a large party of deported Armenians to Opella on the road to Deir-el-Zor."

"Is it possible they were on the market square that day?" she said with a start.

"Quite possible. I rested a day at Halat and then went back to Opella. I had promised the pastor to do all in my power to find and bring his relatives back to safety. I traced the party, in which I thought the family was most likely to be found, as far as El Marasch."

"Why, that was the village which had no room for us two nights ago."

"Yes, because it was packed full of these unhappy exiles. I was making inquiries among them at one of the khans when I caught sight of the German consul standing outside."

She uttered a little low sound.

"That was the fine way in which he was doing his best for you," said John Culver, significantly. "His escort got talking in the café when he was paying a visit on the Mudir. I was infuriated at what I gathered. I could never have looked Nicholas or your mother in the face if I had not moved heaven and earth to smash the evil he had taken in hand. Besides, there was Zia! The crime against one of God's helpless little ones," the suppressed heat of his voice scorched like a flame. "I was only waiting the right moment to vindicate that atrocity. These friends and kinsmen of mine were near. We are always in close touch and they know every yard of the country. There was only one way to act so as to get you clear away, and then cover our tracks—violence à outrance! But we had to wait the right locality, the psychological moment. We were very near your camp last night and rode on ahead before daybreak. You see the guide was a friend of ours."

"I have been cruelly deceived right through," she muttered.

"Deception is far too mild a word for such deliberate villainy. Do you know where Rosen was taking you? Even those soldiers knew. To the railway half way between Aleppo and Hamah. Where was he going then? Ah, the evil of that secret is hidden in the breast of the dead. The English say, 'all is fair in love and war,'

but there are base artifices no man can use to gain his ends in either unless he possesses the mind of a skunk. *Boche* is the French term for the German, but a real live swine is a clean beast and a gentleman compared with such a type as Otto Rosen."

"John, I owe you more than life. If it had not been for you—" she wished to say more but her voice trailed off. Though the accumulation of the past still weighed with leaden pressure on nerve and brain, the look she turned on him spoke plainly of all that had begun to surge afresh in her heart.

"There is no need to worry now, Veronica," he said, soothingly. "All you want is the opportunity to rest. After a good night you will feel more like your real self."

"Inshallah!" she murmured.

They came to more level ground. John mounted his horse and they rode on in silence till suddenly the foremost rider turned aside into a thicket of sweet smelling shrubs and scattered trees. The copse looked impenetrable to any but the initiated, so tortuous and invisible the track, till it fell steeply away into a deep wadi hidden within the folds of the hills.

Close under the overhanging rocks couched the low black tents of the Bedouins. For carpet a strip of verdure edged the tiny stream which was overhung by willows and clustering oleander bushes. Down the gully were tethered a large number of camels and mares, grazing on a scanty herbage of flowers and grass.

Two or three dogs barked. Then women and children ran to greet the home comers who at once became the center of a babbling crowd.

John lifted Veronica from her mare and led her towards the large central tent where in the entrance sat

a grizzle-bearded man of proud and dignified bearing. He caught sight of them and keen observation flashed from his eyes.

"Here is certainly something too hard for the teeth to bite," he muttered under his breath.

"Peace be unto you, Sheikh Mabruk," called John. "Behold, Allah has given us safe return with a guest for our tents."

"And to you be peace and kinship, O my son," said Sheikh Mabruk, rising at once to give the salaam ceremoniously, "and welcome to the stranger you bring with you!"

As they entered the tent a blue-draped figure with a little child hanging on to her robe, glided from the inner tent. Two great velvety eyes stared bewildered from John to Veronica and back again.

"Stranger, you say, my father? No, for by my soul it is our sister Veronica and none other. Friend of my eyes! My happiness so welcome," she exclaimed joyfully, extending her arms.

Veronica lifted her head with the gesture of one who sitting in darkness suddenly sees light through an opened shutter. She felt as if she had on the moment awakened from a long delirious dream.

"Oh, Zorah darling, is it really you? Now I can breathe again," she said, agitatedly.

"Hanna! Hold her! She is falling," called Zorah, quickly, as Veronica with a little fluttering sigh dropped between their hands into a dead faint.



## CHAPTER XXII

**L**ISTEN!" said Anna Severin as the shrill notes of a crier's voice rose from the street to the cool vaulted terrace where she sat with Pastor Kasbarian.

They had been talking despondently with sinking hearts. No news had come yet of Veronica or the missing daughter-in-law and her family. The experiences brought by escaped refugees from districts already cleared of luckless Armenians were terrifying. On top of acute apprehension for the absent, Anna Severin had been expending her whole energies on nursing Zia through a bad malarial attack, which had left the child in a very weak state.

This responsibility for the youngest treasure of the family had naturally, for the time being, shut out all other cares. It was only now when the child was convalescent, and could be left occasionally entirely to Amina's care, that the incubus of fear for both Veronica and Nicholas pressed upon the mother-heart with ever increasing weight.

Pastor Kasbarian got up and leaned over the breast-work of the terrace the better to hear. He looked grimmer and had aged since his visit to Opella.

The crier was proclaiming the government order—Talaat Bey's "regrettable but very humane measure and military necessity"—to the townlet of Halat that all the Armenian residents without exception were to start under armed escort in six days' time for some nameless unknown destination.

"It has actually come. Now what are we all going to do, I should like to know," exclaimed Mme. Severin. "I warned you to fashion some plan in advance. There is no time to lose now. We must act at once."

"Above all, with complete secrecy," assented Pastor Kasbarian. He went out immediately to consult privately with his flock. That same night the chief members of the Halat community met under his roof to review their position and make some definite decision.

Resistance or non-resistance was the crucial point to consider after ventilating their general dismay and anger. Resistance seemed at first blush a foolhardy proceeding, but the alternative of setting out submissively on an aimless journey, toiling on foot for three to eight weeks, according to the goal, in some malarial or barren desert of Anatolia or Mesopotamia was still blacker prospect.

The gorge of the majority revolted against their terrible fate, though a few bending their heads with fatalistic obedience seemed ready to follow the line of least resistance.

"What is the use of opposition? We shall but court disaster of a worse nature," said one of these.

"Yet to submit blindly means certain disaster, and a probable death of torture," retorted a refugee, warmly.

"The hardships of the way are such that the strongest collapse at the end of one day's journey, by night the Arabs and the Kurds steal the asses and mules. They as well as the guards and muleteers plunder all the travelers and violate the women, young and old. All can scarcely set one foot before the other by reason of the blisters on their swollen and bleeding feet. They are devoured by thirst and not allowed to drink. Many die

by the wayside both of hunger and thirst, and those who survive exhaustion are murdered by the Kurds."

He spoke with savage intensity as though the brutal truth of fearful facts had branded his soul as by fire. A dumb silence followed his speech, a silence that expressed deeper things than words.

"We have heard from other sources that the tortures of these forced journeys are far worse than massacre," said Pastor Kasbarian. "A massacre is quickly done with as I know very well. This newly evolved kind of misery augments daily and yet has only one end to it, a lingering death."

A shuddering breath shook the whole circle. There were those present who feared like their pastor for the safety of loved ones already breasting the waves of that accumulating misery.

"There is no one to protect us but God," declared a desperate voice.

"God is not here at all, my friend," came tragically from another. "We can say like the prophet of old, He is asleep, or He is gone on a journey, visiting one of his distant worlds, forgetting the sorrows of earth."

"Those who help themselves God will surely help however distant He may be," Anna Severin said suddenly in a firm deep voice. "It is always so. What are the Armenian people doing to resist these abominations? Practically nothing. Let us resist with every power at our disposal. In the end we are bound to prevail. Else —" she raised her hands expressively.

"Let us resist!" was the instant response. One or two voices were strong, some hesitating, but the majority agreed.

"How can we?"

"It is impossible. We have no arms."

"Not a needle is left to us to-day, and yet we ought to draw the sword, they say," quoted a gloomy voice.

"We have more resources than you think," came in quick disclaimer from the hopeful members.

The toss to and fro of excited repartee continued a few minutes. Pastor Kasbarian, silent and reflective, gazed steadily through the window. He started when of a sudden a voice appealed directly to him.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help," he replied, unexpectedly, indicating by a gesture the view through the window of the mountain ridge, and its bold promontory striding out into a marvelously blue sea.

"The hills!" An illuminating thought for some, to others a counsel of despair.

"I have that in my mind to say that I have dwelt upon for days past," said the pastor drawing a book from his pocket. "Listen, and I will tell you how the people of Israel acted when subjected to massacre under the invasion of Holofernes. They were newly returned from captivity and had a strong desire to retain their freedom."

He read aloud impressively a few verses from the book of Judith showing how the people of many villages and towns "possessed themselves of the tops of the high mountains, and fortified those villages that were in them and laid up victuals for the provision of war: for their fields were of late reaped." And how by choosing their positions well they were able to keep the passages of the hill country and repulse all who tried to come up.

With concentrated attention they all listened. Confidence, elation, resolution sparkled suddenly in every eye



as the drift of the pastor's meaning was grasped first by one and then the other of his rapt audience.

"The hills have already been my hiding place," said a man who remembered the massacres of '95 when all his family had been killed and he alone, a mere lad, had escaped barefoot to the mountain. "Welcome to our pastor's timely counsel! Let us at once deliberate in what way we can best carry it into execution. Our brothers of Zeitoun and Sassoun have before to-day retired to the hills and defended themselves successfully. For all we know they may be doing the same this very hour."

"It is madness. An impossible undertaking," declared a small minority who submitted later, meekly, to deportation, and were never heard of again.

"Submission is even a greater madness," replied Anna Severin, her eyes flashing. "Whatever the danger we shall all share it. Remember when the bed breaks we must be satisfied to lie on the floor."

Prompt organization of all resources was started skillfully by the able Armenian brains. Envoys were sent to other places of the vicinity. From the lovely little town of Yoghonolok came the encouraging news to Pastor Kasbarian that the Armenian inhabitants were already speeding up plans for a similar retirement to the hills behind, under the leadership of a pastor lately returned to that his native place as a refugee from Zeitoun.

With secrecy and dispatch the Halat families pushed on their own preparations, having decided to join forces with the other villages for a general exodus. Every resource of food and arms possible to transport was mustered by the organizing heads; grain and cattle, goats and fowls, family stores of flour, coffee, nuts, figs, dates,

oil, and vegetable produce. Tents, bedding, cooking utensils, all had to be taken into account.

Of weapons they had but 120 up-to-date guns, about 400 of an antiquated design, a few old pistols, and, for all these scanty enough ammunition. But every man and boy had their big girdle knives, and there were not a few lances, and serviceable clubs.

Spasms of bitter weeping did not fail among the women, heartbroken for the tragic loss of their homes. Children ran in and out as usual, alternately helping and hindering, bursting with the excitement of coming change, the whole business being to them a glorified picnic to which camping-out was to lend its perennial glamour.

Always brought up to dread the enemy at their gate, these preparations were but the evil dream come true to the adults as a mass. The grim faces and set faces of the men formed a plain index to their stiffened resolve to hold out to the "edge of doom." Never again would these at any rate submit afresh to a bootless and merciless tyranny.

"My Veronica! Would to God I could be certain that all was well with her," exclaimed Mme. Severin on the second day of strenuous work. "What if she were to reach Halat after we had all left. Such a possibility terrifies me."

"Banish that fear utterly. She is in no danger, none whatever," replied the pastor. "No one will know better than your American friends the state of the roads for traveling. They will not allow her to stir from Opella. Besides our secret courier starts to-night to beg the consul's intervention on our behalf. A special message can go at the same time about Veronica."

His confidence brought a measure of relief to Anna Severin, but she could not rid her mind of presentiment. Tales of fearful happenings were constantly rolling in to add to her anxiety. As well she yearned for the moral support of her girl's companionship, more even than for her skillful handling of complicated arrangements.

The special task acting as safety valve for her emotions, that she had taken up conjointly with the pastor's wife, was the accumulation from all quarters of soft and old linen to form bandages for the wounded and sick during the days lying inevitably ahead.

Very early next morning when she was sorting some of the various stores sent in, pondering sadly the while on Veronica, Amina burst into the room.

"Allah! The young Sitt is come. She is even now at the door. Behold, it is she herself who stands before your eyes!"

The startled face, suddenly grown white as milk, and the quick movement of her hand to her heart, betrayed the unwisdom of fresh shocks for Mme. Severin's strained nerves.

For one breathless instant the slim Bedouin-clad figure of Veronica paused in the doorway to fling off the disguising abbai and head shawl.

"Don't be frightened, *mamouschka!* It is really and truly your own Veronica," she called out, and then springing forward she caught her mother in her arms and kissed her till the pale cheeks tingled with warm color.

The wonder, the joy, the relief, worked like a strong tonic upon Mme. Severin. Burdens which had seemed intolerable, responsibilities beyond her capacities, all fell

miraculously away. Nothing could fail or go wrong now Veronica was again at her side.

"How did you come? Who has brought you? What dangers you must have braved! God is very good," she gasped at last.

"John Culver brought me safely through everything. He is with Zia, who is beside herself with happiness. Yes, dearest mother, dangers have been thick and tragic since we parted, and the way most difficult, but all is surmounted, thanks to John. I cannot begin to tell you what he has done for me."

"Dear, good soul!"

"Yes, he is a dear soul and a noble man. You will hear everything soon. All I can think of this moment is how good it is to be with you again."

"At a grave moment, *chérie*. We are all on the eve of leaving Halat for the summit of Jebel Moussa."

"Is it possible? But I can guess why. It is to avoid deportation—and worse!"

"Yes, the whole village is to be voluntarily evacuated, and several others. All have agreed to combine in order to make a strong resistance to the Turks."

"How I rejoice!" cried Veronica.

"Look, you can help me," said Mme. Severin pointing to the rolls of linen. "There will be wounded to tend, and no doubt sick women and children. Thank God we know what to do and shall be able to work together."

"Yes, though I shall not be satisfied unless in between the nursing I can shoot some of the murderers myself, and make them pay," said the girl, with a look in her eyes that was new to the mother. "When are we to start?"



"Towards sunset, to-morrow. There is still much to get ready, but you must first rest after your journey."

"No, I am not tired. I am quite prepared now to take on the lion's share of all you have arranged to do," she asserted stoutly, once more courageously confident to face the worst that might befall.

All at once she clasped her arms again round her mother's neck and looked deep into her eyes.

"You must be glad with me," she whispered tremulously. "Pierre has been found, and again it was entirely owing to John. By now he is certainly free. John would not let me wait on the chance of seeing him. There were terrible reasons that made it impossible and perilous for us to linger where we were. But Pierre will come to us, perhaps very soon. John will arrange that. Do you quite understand, darling mother? Pierre is found! He is alive! We shall meet again."

For a moment her voice though low had the thrill and music of a happy singing bird. Mme. Severin swallowed a sob. She longed to weep—to weep for pity for the girl's dream of love hovering like a mirage in a wilderness of woe; to weep for wrath at the monstrous depravity which was odiously destroying a myriad hearths and homes as well as the dreams of every lover in the land.

"*Douschka moya*," said Mme. Severin, tenderly, lapsing as always in moments of deep emotion into the tongue of her childhood, "remember we are all in God's hands. We can be sure of nothing but what has already come to pass."

"You must not say that," said Veronica with a sudden catch in her voice. "I would rather think now that he was dead than be led to expect to see him and then find later I had lost him forever."

"Only God knows the future and He has not forbidden us to hope. Hope with a stout heart for the fulfillment of your hope, and who knows that it may not help to bring it to pass? And now come, we must seek out John. My gratitude to him is again mountain high, and no doubt he has a great deal to talk over and arrange afresh. Tell me has he found any trace of the young Kasbarian family?"

"Not any at all. We fear the worst has happened, for I have seen things with my own eyes to make angels weep, and the dead writhe and groan in their graves."

Mme. Severin was profoundly moved. During the whole of the girl's life her mother had not hidden the tragedies of past years from her, but with the knowledge she had always inculcated the hope and faith that they would never recur. And now a worse fate had fallen upon her father's race than had ever yet overtaken it. The sons and daughters of all those who had suffered in the past had to expiate, not the sins of their fathers but the heritage of their loyalty, their liberalism, their higher intellect and superior business ability. All the qualities in fact which made them the cornerstone of the Ottoman Empire, but also a formidable rival to German penetration, commercially and politically, in Turkey in Asia.

John Culver's disclosures of the convoys of Armenians he had seen personally and their horrible sufferings, of the ignoble part played by German silence and callous aloofness, of Rosen's despicable conduct and merited fate, acted like a spur to the energies of the Kasbarian household, and to others who shared their confidence.

"He will not be able to attempt the cross-country journey at once," he said, speaking privately to Mme. Severin when she questioned him about Pierre Marson.

"Ali was to undertake the rescue. It was really simple enough and is possibly safely accomplished by now. The two guards were to be surprised and overpowered by night. After freeing Marson, Ali and his companions were to rebuild the wall so as to delay discovery of the escape. I feel sure the Mudir will hush up the whole affair for fear of his own skin. He will pretend for a time the prisoner is still there, and then eventually report he is dead."

"How well you read the native mind!"

"It is easy when one has lived practically all one's life up against it. As I told you, Zorah was very wishful to keep Veronica with her, but it was wiser to come to you. You needed a daughter's help, and she was in desperate need of mother-care and sympathy."

Anna Severin's eyes suffused with warm tears, having heard already what Veronica had come through. She pressed John's hand expressively.

"Besides the Beni-Weldeh intend soon to trek into the desert, as far as possible from the smell of war," he added.

"Are you going with them?"

"I shall only follow when I have done all that is possible in this crisis. Above all I must be certain of your safety. I feel responsible for it to Nicholas. I cannot see real light ahead on the upshot of the struggle that is sure to come on Jebel Moussa. It all depends upon what action the Turks will take."

"We shall prevail," said Anna Severin, confidently. "I have no fear of the result. In any case prospects are better than if we stayed here. About Zia I want your candid opinion. How do you think she is looking?"

"Sadly," he said gravely. Mme. Severin started, her brows puckered sorrowfully. "I am amazed she ever survived that brutal treatment. I wish I could adequately reward that faithful Amina."

"She asks for nothing but the love of the child, and that she has more than ever before. How thankful I am you are here to aid and guide our removal. It is like having my own dear son," and she leaned over and embraced him.

The day passed excitedly and anxiously as also the next, and both all too soon. Every one was feverishly intent on taking away all that was possible to transport, or carry on their persons. For not a soul entertained the smallest hope of ever seeing their homes again.

The actual hour of departure rushed on. Long processions of families on foot, in carts, on donkeys and mules, all heavily laden, began to trail across the plain, and up from the roots of the hill by paths all converging steadily upon the same goal, the summit of Jebel Moussa.

The gravity of the hour calling upon every scrap of feminine energy and ingenuity in marshaling their families and goods soon dried the women's tears, though the lump in their throats grew bigger. And then Nature showed a curious willingness to take up and carry on the lament. Clouds from the sea dimmed the sunset and came swiftly to the land. They enveloped the mountain and dissolved with night into dripping rain.

No less than 4,200 fugitives, shepherded in their separate villages, camped out in the rain on the hill top. The majority of them were soaked to the skin before tents could be pitched or sheltering booths of any kind erected. The first and chief attention had to be given



to the guns. Powder and other ammunition had to be kept dry. All else was of secondary importance.

But the sun rose bright and cloudless after the rain. The tragic hours of the night were forgotten under its drying penetrating heat. For her own, and the Kasbarian family, Amina conjured up hot coffee, and for Zia a big bowl of new goat's milk.

Veronica slept late, tired out after the strain of the night, and helping John to put up a shelter for the family. John, himself, after snatching a couple of hours' sleep towards morning, had since disappeared to share in the deliberations of the men about the military defense of the mountain.

"A committee of defense has been elected by vote," he explained later. "Trenches are already being constructed at the strategical points of ascent. The defense is being thoroughly well organized, and before the Turks attack all will be ready for their reception. It will be a warm one."

Their whole site had been wonderfully selected on the flattened shoulder of the mountain, thrusting seawards to plunge precipitously into the waves. On the land side there were steep descents thick with rocks, chaparral and trees, lending themselves readily to skilled defense of the position. On the summit there were open spaces between trees and the shelter of bushes. Above all there was water, accessible and pure. Between the camps and the other part of the ridge yawned a deep ravine, its steep slopes overhung with brushwood and trees.

John stayed with them all day working indefatigably to evoke order out of chaos for other families as well as the Severins. Sorely divided in the pursuit of the mani-

fold duties he had imposed upon himself it was hard to decide whether to remain as a fighting unit on the hill top, or to continue his rescues and then return to his wife and child who could not be left indefinitely.

## CHAPTER XXIII

PIERRE MARSON had reached the pitch of believing that liberty would never be more than a word to him. For the encouraging hope whispered mysteriously into his prison after the unutterable passage with the German consul had borne no fruition.

He suffered more than if he had been forbidden to hope. In that case sheer defiance would have stiffened his will still stubbornly to hold out. The cigarettes and matches contained in the package flung through the air hole had been a timely solace, supporting him right buoyantly through the first days of anticipation.

But as one day followed another and nothing changed, and then a whole week of days went by with no sign at all of the hinted rescue, dread clutched hold of him that the voice of hope had been a delusion, and the tobacco a sop administered secretly by some humane companion of the German consul.

As soon as these ideas began to work in his mind he seemed to himself like a man who had staked his all and lost it. Like one who has been robbed of his last hope his soul became gradually numbed, though at first he fought hard to elude the appalling onslaught of forebodings. Then as the hours and days still crawled by, and nothing was altered, a stillness as of death dropped upon him, mentally and physically.

He came to a state of feeling nothing at all, neither

hunger nor sorrow, fear nor hope. He ate and drank mechanically and slept at intervals like a drugged man. Just as he had brought nothing into the world so now he seemed to be waiting to pass out of life stripped bare of all he had ever possessed and treasured. The need to live had withdrawn to some deep recess of being.

It is a desperate situation when the heart of a brave man fails him. That Pierre had held out even so long without reaching this climax spoke volumes for his capacity for endurance. Undoubtedly his love for Veronica had been the chief saving factor so far, combined with the secret vital belief that some unexpected volte-face of fortune might yet enable him to carry on and complete the errand for which he had been dispatched from France.

But now if he gave a thought to his mission at all it was only to tell himself with shuddering humiliation that success from the first had been hopeless. From the outset doomed to failure he had risked his life and his love to no purpose but to rot to his death in a filthy tomb, forgotten of God and his own kind. That he did not attempt to take his own life was due simply to the inertia which now bound his whole being.

Yet at rare intervals a glimmering ray would suddenly pierce the blackness of his mood.

"My Veronica!" he would murmur, and be at once conscious of a slight uplift of the deathly gloom. It was almost as if for a fleeting second an invisible bridge had swung in midair across the gulf which separated the lovers. And who shall deny that the prayers and yearning heart of the distant girl had created the tremulous light-ray which had shot through space and touched into momentary life the tortured soul of the man she loved.



“Ah, n'en doutons pas! a travers les temps et les espaces, les âmes ont quelquefois des correspondences mystérieuses. En vain le monde réel élève ses barrières entre deux êtres qui s'aiment; habitans de la vie idéale, ils s'apparaissent dans l'absence, ils s'unissent dans la mort.”

Before dawn comes the blackest hour of the night. The plans of rescue had to be spun with the utmost caution. To attempt it directly after the catastrophe overtaking the German consul would be to hazard its success. But as time went on and no connecting link was suggested between the attack upon his party and his visit to the prisoner of the tomb, the plans ripened for his deliverance.

It was on the tenth night after John Culver's risky visit to the tomb that a small Bedouin party with Ali as their leader fell silently upon the two watchmen. The men, first clubbed to unconsciousness, were then gagged and blindfolded with their own head shawls, and their feet and hands bound.

Quickly the stone barrier was demolished. At the first sound from without Pierre Marson started up as if waked from a frightful dream.

“Mort de Dieu!” he whispered in a hoarse voice. “Is it possible? Has it come at last? And which will it be—life or death?”

“Hoosh! In the name of Allah are you there, O prisoner of the tomb?” said a cautious voice. “Come forth if you can stand upon your feet.”

“Dieu! Dieu!” muttered Marson, stumbling forward like a drunken man till he stood in the cleared entrance. He was shaking with excitement, and overcome by an extraordinary weakness that he had never felt through

the whole of his imprisonment. The revulsion from despair to joy had been too much for his exhausted body.

He took deep inhalations and looked up at the sky, strength and hope streaming into him as he breathed.

"Water! Give me water, and bread if you have it," were his first words. He was given bread, and to drink out of a small flask of weak aniseed and water specially provided to fortify him.

While alternately he ate and drank, and lifting his face to the sky continued to breathe in deeply the overpowering, priceless air of freedom, Ali and his friends carried the bound men into the tomb, then tumbled the stones and rocks pell mell into the doorway.

"Come my brother," said Ali in a low voice. "We must ride far before sunrise."

"You have horses? Good, for I am still very lame."

"Lame? Have you always been lame?" said Ali, amazed.

"No, they tortured me."

"They tortured him," repeated one to the other, breathlessly. "Hanna knew nothing of this."

Not without difficulty and help was Marson able to reach the tethered beasts on the off-side of the hill. Once in the saddle he was a new man. As they rode forward together he felt very near to safety, and yet only safe as long as the darkness endured. Yet the confident bearing of the Bedouins did not alter with the daylight, and with every hour that passed he was conscious that the danger of any pursuit diminished.

Veronica would have had pains to recognize Pierre had they suddenly come face to face. A thick black beard straggled over his chest, his hair was long and unkempt. His cheeks were hollowed and the clear bronzed

skin of his face had paled to the sickly hue of those long shut out from the sunshine. And his eyes once so keen and bright shone with a curiously disturbing light, the look of one who had faced under terrible odds both mental and physical torture.

Yet, wrapped in an abbai, and his head muffled by a keffiyeh, he differed in outward appearance scarcely a jot from his companions.

By degrees he learnt the story of all that had happened to the Severin family since his arrest in the lane. Pierre could scarcely contain himself upon hearing of Veronica's constant great peril, and the events leading to her rescue.

"Then that devil incarnate told me the naked truth," he ruminated. "My precious girl was at that moment in his clutches. If I had known neither stones nor mortar could have held me back from flying at his throat."

One instant he exulted in the fact of Rosen's swift retribution, the next he would be savage at being balked of his share—the biggest share—of vengeance.

Rest and secure shelter came to him in the Bedouin camp. In a day or two he neither felt nor looked like the same man. It was like a real resurrection from the tomb.

John Culver came back in another two days with the great news of the encampment on Jebel Moussa, and bearing a little letter from Veronica, who had never doubted of her lover's rescue. The warm throbbing heart with which she had written was revealed in every line. Pierre read and re-read the letter a few dozen times forgetting all the torments of his captivity. Every detail that John Culver could relate he asked him to repeat a score of times over.

There was no course for him to take but that of secretly making his way to Jebel Moussa. Yet first, said John Culver, his strength must be recuperated. He must go there to be a support, not an added anxiety.

By the time Pierre, with Ali for guide, was ready to start for the hill of refuge, Veronica had settled down to a routine of hourly excitement, and the hardest work of her life. The fight between Turk and Armenian had begun in earnest.

At first the Turks under their usual impression that a mere handful of regular troops are enough to hold hundreds of Kurds or Armenians in check, attacked disdainfully with but a hundred troops. These were easily repulsed. They returned in greater numbers and this time with a gun.

The first intimation of this danger was when a shell tore screaming overhead and exploded in a corner of the encampment. Then another and still another worked cruel ravage.

"Come quickly! O come quickly," gasped a woman rushing up to Veronica who was helping skillfully to tend and bandage the injured in the improvised ambulance shelter. "The good mother has been cruelly hurt in trying to save the little one."

Veronica's heart leaped and then seemed to stop beating, but she kept her presence of mind, quietly summoning another helper to continue her task.

"My mother is hurt. I am bound to go to her," she explained while hastily putting together bandages and other appliances she might need.

Once outside the shelter she ran as if pursued over the ground separating her from their own tent. A group at the entrance divided to let her pass through.



"Zia has not even a scratch," said a voice, reassuringly. All these people enduring and resisting heroically in common were drawn in sympathy together by the same cords of feeling. What affected one member touched many.

In a moment Veronica was kneeling by the stricken form of her mother.

"Light! Give me more light," she called back agitatedly to those who darkened the entrance.

"Keep a brave heart, chérie! I am in no pain," whispered Anna Severin, opening her eyes for a moment. Her chest and shoulder were soaked in blood. It seemed to Veronica's horrified eyes there was blood everywhere.

"Tell Amina to come here," she said, looking round again, and then at once with deft tender touch setting to work to examine the nature of the wounds.

"Let me alone, dear heart! You can do nothing. This is the end. I always knew the Turks would one day cause my death," said Anna, slowly. "I leave my Zia to your charge. You will be a mother to her."

"All my life," said Veronica, firmly, "but I entreat you to let me try and ease you my precious mother." She tried hard to control her voice, but paused, overcome for a second. Again she asked for Amina with a sharp new note of fear in her accent.

Nobody gave any answer at all, then an old woman entered and came up to her.

"I will be your servant. Amina has been struck down like her mistress. Ai! The poor soul is quite done for. She was going to fetch you and her doom met her on the way."

"Where is the child?" asked Veronica, hoarsely.

"Safe!"

"Yes, the good God be thanked, I was able to preserve her from harm," murmured Mme. Severin. "My poor faithful Amina! She is not suffering."

Just then Pastor Kasbarian entered the tent.

"My daughter, we are all in God's hands," he said with a break in his harsh voice. He stood over his cousin speechless at first, then getting down upon his knees he began solemnly to recite the appropriate prayers of his church.

Veronica, after doing all that was possible at this juncture, held her mother's hand, looking fixedly into her face. The shadows already growing there were unmistakable. Mme. Severin was sinking rapidly.

"Break the news gently to Nicholas," she said with difficulty. "He has always been the best son in the world."

Veronica's head bent low to hide the quick onrush of scalding tears. She kissed her mother's hands.

"And my Vronka! No mother has been more blessed in her children," murmured the failing voice.

The din of firing had suddenly ceased. Only the shouts of distant voices, and the confused hubbub of sounds that arise from a multitude compressed into a small area, came to the ear.

The camp defenders at their wits' end to check the ravages of the gun had resorted to strategy. A clever sharp shooter among them had stolen undetected through the brushwood until he was so near he could hear the Turkish gunners talking. From his hiding place he shot down one of them, and very soon with five bullets had laid low four more.

Vainly the Turks beat the bushes to discover the enemy marksman. In a fury at their failure the captain gave

the order to withdraw the gun to a distance. The camp was left in peace that day and several days to come.

Suddenly Pastor Kasbarian was called for from without the tent. He got up not knowing what fresh urgent appeal of duty was upon him. A stir of voices followed his exit and then a new silence.

Shortly he reëntered the tent followed by two men. The one who had bared his head was Pierre Marson. The other, Ali, his guide and companion, was weeping unrestrainedly for the new calamity that had befallen his friends.

Veronica, her whole soul engrossed in her mother alone, at one moment moistening the parched lips, and the next tenderly wiping the death dew from the pallid brow, neither stirred nor looked round. Pastor Kasbarian bent over her whispering in her ear. Pierre then knelt without a word close beside her, put his arm round her waist and held her closely.

For an instant she turned her head with an unfathomable look of anguish in her eyes and leaning heavily against the encircling arm seemed on the point of collapse. Then forcibly controlling herself her whole figure stiffened, her face sank to her mother and she kissed her with all her soul.

The deep set eyes of Anna Severin suddenly opened wide, and shone with peculiar luster as they looked from Pierre to Veronica.

"Now I can die in peace," she said in a clear voice. She took their hands and put them one in the other. "Thus united you must always be, and love and care for each other as long as your hearts beat."

"To eternity," said Pierre, fervently, bending over her hand.

"Do not let my Zia see me like this. She is so sensitive. The memory would cling to her."

"Zia shall always be our first care," said Pierre. "Till Nicholas claims her she shall be like my own daughter."

"Keep a brave heart," she whispered again. "Escape is assured. You will all win freedom and go back to our dear France. A little longer yet. It is ordained—I can see it plainly." Her voice was still fainter. As the light faded out of her eyes they took on the look of one who sees dimly into a mystic distance, hidden from those still on earth.

Again she smiled at them all, and pressed Veronica's hand. "Andreas, my husband!" she called suddenly. "He is here."

Then, stirring lightly she passed out of this life of strife with the gentle sigh of one tired and gladly falling upon sleep.

The brave Armenian fighters on that mountain top not only successfully defied the Turkish army but kept it at bay for weeks. After the bombardment had failed the enemy prepared an attack in force by three thousand regular troops. They forced a passage to the summit of the ridge, where they pushed along until only a deep ravine separated them from the refugee camp.

Night fell too soon for them to complete their victory. The Turks with their usual fatalism and procrastination ceased their advance never dreaming that the Christians would be courageous enough to attack them before day-break.

The lights of the Armenian camps were all extinguished while the leaders hastily constructed a dar-



ing plan to confound the foe. This was to surround the Turks while they slept, startle them with a rapid discharge of musketry, and then fall upon them in a fierce man to man conflict.

Every rock, stone and by-path of Jebel Moussa was familiar to the Armenians. They scaled the hill on all sides without awakening the least alarm. A signal started the firing. Nothing at all was haphazard for they could not afford to lose a single cartridge. Every bullet had to find its mark. In quick space of time that ravine was filled with terror to the Turkish soldiers as with the energy lent by desperation every man sprang upon the foe.

Vainly the officers rallied their troops. The mischief was done. Disordered and demoralized they scrambled into safety as best they could. Before the dawn the woods were empty but for the corpses of two hundred Turks and a large harvest of ammunition badly needed by the Armenians.

When the Turks came back after the lapse of several days it was with a large body of many more thousand than before, but it was not to fight this time, only to surround the hill and starve the insurgents into surrender.

"A cordon is formed. They are blockading us," was the first notice brought into the camp by one of the scouts. "They want to see us starved to the point at which they will be certain of an easy walk-over," said one of the leaders. "They wish to save their own skins whatever the result to us. We will beat them by the might of God's own justice."

A true prophecy, for the story of their gallant struggle against such terrible odds with their backs to the sea

has become history to be recorded to all ages as one of the most heroic achievements of a brave, much enduring race. To relate all the details would fill another book.

A month passed by. Through husbanding their provisions they had all managed to subsist. They calculated that with care they might still carry on for another fortnight, but after that starvation lurked ahead.

It was particularly at that time they began to look to the sea as a means of escape. The outlook over the Mediterranean had from the outset suggested possibilities of freedom, instilling courage into the souls of not a few.

"There is hope in the sea but no hope in the grave," said one to the other, though many an old person of the multitude had never before clapped eyes on the sea. For their closer comfort they held stoutly to the ancient Armenian proverb, "In every city of the East I find a home."

Confident in the hope of escaping by the sea they prepared three copies of an appeal to the captain of any passing vessel. It was a veritable S.O.S. appeal addressed to any English, French, Italian, or Russian admiral or captain, in the name of God and of human brotherhood. It described how the people of six villages, some five thousand souls in all, in escaping from Turkish barbarity had resisted week by week the attacks and blockade of a large army. They begged to be transported to Cyprus or elsewhere, declaring that wherever they were taken they would never be idle but work hard for their bread. The appeal was signed by the Protestant pastor of Zeitoun, Dikran Andreassian.

To three of the best swimmers of the camp was given the task of watching the sea with the object of at once

plunging through the breakers and doing their best to gain the side of the first ship that went by.

But many days went by and no ship came into sight. Then at the pastor's advice the women made two immense flags. They were white, and on one was painted in great black letters, "Christians in distress! Help!" while the other was decorated with a large red cross.

Food and ammunition dwindled fearsomely. The Turks clamored for their surrender. The days were all heavy with anxiety and the nights very long.

For Veronica and Pierre they were wonderful and memorable days. Not days for softness and the dallying of lovers at all, but for mutual support of strong hearts and a boundless trust through hours of unmitigated stress. A passionate zest marked their every action. Busied with one sufferer and the other, as well as performing the part of a true mother to little Zia, Veronica was swept along by the energy of a divine altruism that focussed every impulse and passion of her loyal soul.

More and more Pierre Marson grew to appreciate at its highest worth the magnificent pluck that had kept her spirit living and unafraid under trials, peril, and a great bereavement that would have crushed to annihilation many a weaker soul. Always he hoped that to a French ship would come the honor and the glory of rescuing this remnant of his sweetheart's brave, hard driven race. It was a happiness that actually materialized for him on the 53rd day of the siege.

The French cruiser Guichen perceiving the signals of the S.O.S. flags and at once understanding their meaning, drew near enough to the shore for the swimmers to approach with their appeal. A wireless to the admiral of the fleet brought other men of war to the spot. The

Turks were bombarded till they fled far from the mountain and rescue could begin.

Under conditions of stupendous difficulties and danger—for the sea was very rough—the people were conveyed to the ships on rafts that had to be specially constructed. Prodigies of valor and resourcefulness were displayed by the French sailors. From morning till late into the night the embarkations continued until the wonder was performed of shipping old men, women and children without a single accident.

At last the strand was emptied. Only the men remained on the hill top fighting to hold the enemy at a distance. Of these one may be sure that Pierre Marson was not the least daring and valiant. What the women, in safety themselves, suffered during that night, their hearts sick with this latest suspense of waiting for the final rescues, is not easily described. Uncertainty and dread combined with the knowledge of her own helplessness to avert any new stroke of a pitiless destiny completely prostrated Veronica.

However, at last the night passed away and with the dawn came courage and hope. The ship guns swept the heights with their fire while on the beach below, divided into groups of twenty, the last of the men were successfully embarked.

They had prepared a huge pile of wood on which everything had been placed that they were unable to carry away. The last to leave set fire to the wood. The giant bonfire was flaming and smoking like a funeral pyre while the French warships steamed away towards Egypt with their living cargo—all saved by the grace of God.

A few days after landing at Alexandria Veronica and

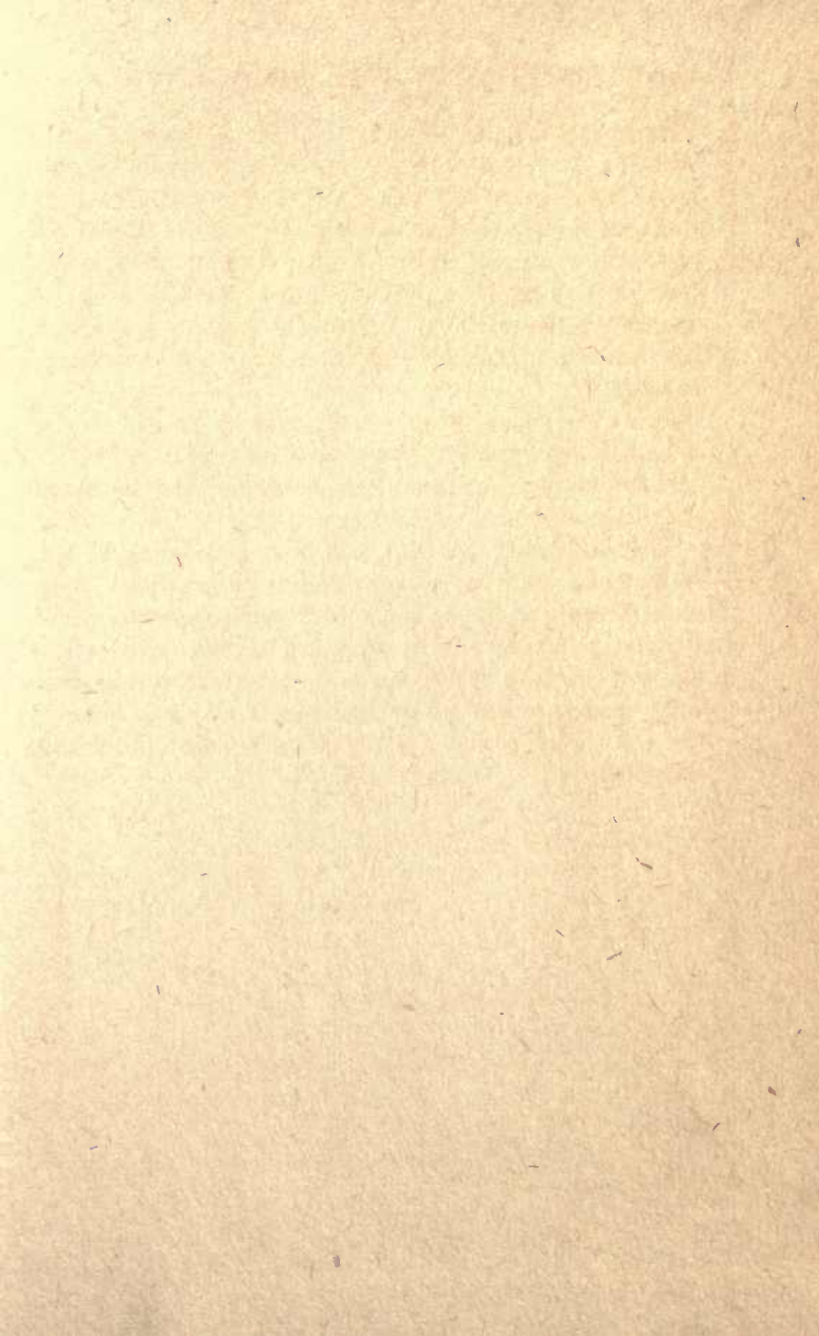


Pierre were married, first at the French Consulate, and then by Pastor Kasbarian at the Armenian church. Later they embarked for France on one of the first steamers that carried refugees to Marseilles. Little Zia of course went with them. Deprived at one blow of the love of her grandmother and nurse she had soon responded unreservedly to Veronica's devoted care, giving her unstinted affection, and growing steadily stronger in health.

It was not until a year later that Nicholas Severin, taken prisoner on the Palestine Front by the British, was able to get into touch with his family, and hear the sad news of his mother's tragic death.

That his share, and also that of Veronica and Pierre, in the great War was not over then is understood. With natures such as theirs one solemn obligation but paves the road to others. With eyes fixed unswervingly on the ultimate triumph of freedom and liberty and justice they never ceased to contribute all in their power to help on the great work with the whole of their native pluck and endurance.

THE END







**A** 000 040 396 4



